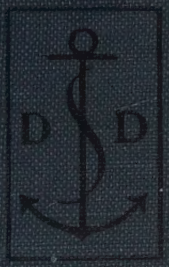
Significant Contemporary Stories

Edith Mirrielees



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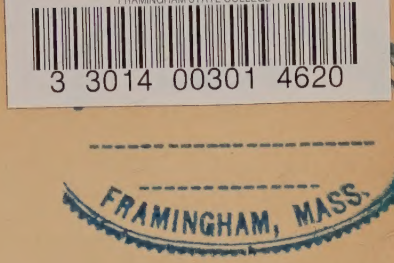

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SIGNIFICANT CONTEMPORARY STORIES

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EDITED BY

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PREFACE

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In *Le Roman Anglais de Notre Temps,* Abel Chevalley defines the contemporary English novel. It is, says M. Chevalley, "a fiction in prose of a certain magnitude." A definition equally nebulous must serve for the contemporary short story. In this first fraction of the twentieth century a short story is a fiction in prose of a somewhat limited magnitude—that and no more. Nothing else can be positively asserted of it, for nothing else is invariably true. Against the attempted demarcations of the '90's and of the very early years of the present century the revolt has been vigorous and complete. That "essential difference between the true short-story and the more carelessly composed tale" for which Dr. Brander Matthews once did valiant service is now a difference as disregarded as is the hyphen wherewith he sought to emphasize it. A volume of short stories made up only of short-stories would be as untrue to the present literary form as a basque to the present human one.

In this particular volume, then, the fiction included is fiction of many kinds. The stream-of-consciousness story, the surprise-ending story, the sketch, all find place. As concerns the examples representing these kinds, they have been included for one reason only—because, once read, they refused to depart from mind. "Greatest" is a dangerous word to apply to any piece of writing, a word that returns to plague the user, but if the compiler of this collection were to express her own belief about the individual stories in it, that demanding word would be applied to three of those here found, each one "greatest" of its own variety among contemporary short stories. Of the rest, there is no one but seems to deserve, and notably to deserve, a life more extended than that offered by periodical publication.

E. M.

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THE SWORD AND THE IDOL[1]

Lord Dunsany

It was a cold winter's evening late in the Stone Age; the sun had gone down blazing over the plains of Thold; there were no clouds, only the chill blue sky and the imminence of stars; and the surface of the sleeping Earth began to harden against the cold of the night. Presently from their lairs arose, and shook themselves and went stealthily forth, those of Earth's children to whom it is the law to prowl abroad as soon as the dusk has fallen. And they went pattering softly over the plain, and their eyes shone in the dark, and crossed and recrossed one another in their courses. Suddenly there became manifest in the midst of the plain that fearful portent of the presence of Man—a little flickering fire. And the children of Earth who prowl abroad by night looked sideways at it and snarled and edged away; all but the wolves, who came a little nearer, for it was winter and the wolves were hungry, and they had come in thousands from the mountains, and they said in their hearts, "We are strong." Around the fire a little tribe was encamped. They, too, had come from the mountains, and from lands beyond them, but it was in the mountains that the wolves first winded them; they picked up bones at first that the tribe had dropped, but they were closer now and on all sides. It was Loz who had lit the fire. He had killed a small furry beast, hurling his stone axe at it, and had gathered a

[1]Reprinted from *A Dreamer's Tales,* by Lord Dunsany, by and with permission of and special arrangement with G. P. Putnam's Sons, of London and New York, authorized publishers.

quantity of reddish brown stones, and had laid them in a long row, and placed bits of the small beast all along it; then he lit a fire on each side, and the stones heated, and the bits began to cook. It was at this time that the tribe noticed that the wolves who had followed them so far were no longer content with the scraps of deserted encampments. A line of yellow eyes surrounded them, and when it moved it was to come nearer. So the men of the tribe hastily tore up brushwood and felled a small tree with their flint axes, and heaped it all over the fire that Loz had made, and for a while the great heap hid the flame, and the wolves came trotting in and sat down again on their haunches much closer than before; and the fierce and valiant dogs that belonged to the tribe believed that their end was about to come while fighting, as they had long since prophesied it would. Then the flame caught the lofty stack of brushwood, and rushed out of it, and ran up the side of it, and stood up haughtily far over the top, and the wolves seeing this terrible ally of Man reveling there in his strength, and knowing nothing of his frequent treachery to his masters, went slowly away as though they had other purposes. And for the rest of that night the dogs of the encampment cried out to them to come back. But the tribe lay down all around the fire under thick furs and slept. And a great wind arose and blew into the roaring heart of the fire till it was red no longer, but all pallid with heat. With the dawn the tribe awoke.

Loz might have known that after such a mighty conflagration nothing could remain of his small furry beast, but there was hunger in him and little reason as he searched among the ashes. What he found there amazed him beyond measure; there was no meat, there was not even his row of reddish brown stones, but something longer than a man's leg and narrower than his hand was lying there like a great flattened snake. When Loz

looked at its thin edges and saw that it ran to a point, he picked up stones to chip it and make it sharp. It was the instinct of Loz to sharpen things. When he found that it could not be chipped, his wonderment increased. It was many hours before he discovered that he could sharpen the edges by rubbing them with a stone; but at last the point was sharp, and all one side of it except near the end, where Loz held it in his hand. And Loz lifted it and brandished it, and the Stone Age was over. That afternoon in the little encampment, just as the tribe moved on, the Stone Age passed away, which, for perhaps thirty or forty thousand years, had slowly lifted man from among the beasts and left him with his supremacy beyond all hope of reconquest.

It was not for many days that any other man tried to make for himself an iron sword by cooking the same kind of small furry beast that Loz had tried to cook. It was not for many years that any thought to lay the meat along stones as Loz had done; and when they did, being no longer in the plains of Thold, they used flints and chalk. It was not for many generations that another piece of iron ore was melted and the secret slowly guessed. Nevertheless one of Earth's many veils was torn aside by Loz to give us ultimately the steel sword and the plough, machinery and factories; let us not blame Loz if we think that he did wrong, for he did all in ignorance. The tribe moved on until it came to water, and there it settled down under a hill, and they built their huts there. Very soon they had to fight with another tribe, a tribe that was stronger than they, but the sword of Loz was terrible and his tribe slew their foes. You might make one blow at Loz, but then would come one thrust from that iron sword, and there was no way of surviving it. No one could fight with Loz. And he became the ruler of the tribe in the place of Iz, who hitherto had ruled it with his sharp axe, as his father had before him.

Now Loz begat Lo, and in his old age gave his sword to him, and Lo ruled the tribe with it. And Lo called the name of the sword Death, because it was so swift and terrible.

And Iz begat Ird, who was of no account. And Ird hated Lo because he was of no account by reason of the iron sword of Lo.

One night Ird stole down to the hut of Lo, carrying his sharp axe, and he went very softly, but Lo's dog, Warner, heard him coming, and he growled softly by his master's door. When Ird came to the hut he heard Lo talking gently to his sword. And Lo was saying, "Lie still, Death. Rest, rest, old sword," and then, "What, again, Death? Be still. Be still."

And then again: "What, art thou hungry, Death? Or thirsty, poor old sword? Soon, Death, soon. Be still only a little."

But Ird fled, for he did not like the gentle tone of Lo as he spoke to his sword.

And Lo begat Lod. And when Lo died Lod took the iron sword and ruled the tribe.

And Ird begat Ith, who was of no account, like his father.

Now when Lod had smitten a man or killed a terrible beast, Ith would go away for a while into the forest rather than hear the praises that would be given to Lod.

And once, as Ith sat in the forest waiting for the day to pass, he suddenly thought he saw a tree trunk looking at him as with a face. And Ith was afraid, for trees should not look at men. But soon Ith saw that it was only a tree and not a man, though it was like a man. Ith used to speak to this tree, and tell it about Lod, for he dared not speak to anyone else about him. And Ith found comfort in talking about Lod.

One day Ith went with his stone axe into the forest and stayed there many days.

He came back by night, and the next morning when the tribe awoke they saw something that was like a man and yet was not a man. And it sat on the hill with its elbows pointed outward and was quite still. And Ith was crouching before it, and hurriedly placing before it fruits and flesh, and then leaping away from it and looking frightened. Presently all the tribe came out to see, but dared not come quite close because of the fear that they saw on the face of Ith. And Ith went into his hut, and came back again with a hunting spear-head and valuable small stone knives, and reached out and laid them before the thing that was like a man, and then sprang away from it.

And some of the tribe questioned Ith about the still thing that was like a man, and Ith said, "This is Ged." They then asked, "Who is Ged?" and Ith said, "Ged sends the crops and the rain; and the sun and the moon are Ged's."

Then the tribe went back to their huts, but later in the day some came again, and they said to Ith, "Ged is only as we are, having hands and feet." And Ith pointed to the right hand of Ged, which was not as his left, but was shaped like the paw of a beast, and Ith said, "By this ye may know that he is not as any man."

Then they said, "He is indeed Ged." But Lod said, "He speaketh not, nor doth he eat," and Ith answered, "The thunder is his voice and the famine is his eating."

After this the tribe copied Ith, and brought little gifts of meat to Ged; and Ith cooked them before him that Ged might smell the cooking.

One day a great thunderstorm came trampling up from the distance and raged among the hills, and the tribe all hid away from it in their huts. And Ith appeared among the huts looking unafraid. And Ith said little, but the tribe thought that he had expected the terrible storm because the meat that they had laid before Ged

had been tough meat, and not the best parts of the beasts that they slew.

And Ged grew to have more honor among the tribe than Lod. And Lod was vexed.

One night Lod arose when all were asleep, and quieted his dog, and took his iron sword and went away to the hill. And he came on Ged in the starlight, sitting still, with his elbows pointing outwards, and his beast's paw, and the mark of the fire on the ground where his food had been cooked.

And Lod stood there for a while in great fear, trying to keep to his purpose. Suddenly he stepped up close to Ged and lifted his iron sword, and Ged neither hit nor shrank. Then the thought came into Lod's mind, "Ged does not hit. What will Ged do instead?"

And the more Lod thought, the worse was his fear of Ged.

And Lod ran away and left him.

Lod still ruled the tribe in battle or in the hunt, but the chiefest spoils of battle were given to Ged, and the beasts that they slew were Ged's; and all questions that concerned war or peace, and questions of law and disputes, were always brought to him, and Ith gave the answers after speaking to Ged by night.

At last Ith said, the day after an eclipse, that the gifts which they brought to Ged were not enough, that some far greater sacrifice was needed, that Ged was very angry even now, and not to be appeased by any ordinary sacrifice.

And Ith said that to save the tribe from the anger of Ged he would speak to Ged that night, and ask him what new sacrifice he needed.

Deep in his heart Lod shuddered, for his instinct told him that Ged wanted Lod's only son, who should hold the iron sword when Lod was gone.

No one would dare touch Lod because of the iron

sword, but his instinct said in his slow mind again and again, "Ged loves Ith. Ith has said so. Ith hates the sword-holders."

"Ith hates the sword-holders. Ged loves Ith."

Evening fell and the night came when Ith should speak with Ged, and Lod became even surer of the doom of his race.

He lay down but could not sleep.

Midnight had barely come when Lod arose and went with his iron sword again to the hill.

And there sat Ged. Had Ith been to him yet? Ith whom Ged loved, who hated the sword-holders.

And Lod looked long at the old sword of iron that had come to his grandfather on the plains of Thold.

"Good-bye, old sword!" And Lod laid it on the knees of Ged, then went away.

And when Ith came, a little before dawn, the sacrifice was found acceptable unto Ged.

THE NEW DRESS[1]

Virginia Woolf

Mabel had her first serious suspicion that something was wrong as she took her cloak off and Mrs. Barnet, while handing her the mirror and touching the brushes and thus drawing her attention, perhaps rather markedly, to all the appliances for tidying and improving hair, complexion, clothes, which existed on the dressing table, confirmed the suspicion—that it was not right, not quite right, which growing stronger as she went upstairs and springing at her with conviction as she greeted Clarissa Dalloway, she went straight to the far end of the room to a shaded corner where a looking-glass hung and looked. No! It was not *right*. And at once the misery which she always tried to hide, the profound dissatisfaction—the sense she had had, ever since she was a child, of being inferior to other people—set upon her, relentlessly, remorselessly, with an intensity which she could not beat off, as she would when she woke at night at home, by reading Borrow or Scott; for oh these men, oh these women, all were thinking—"What's Mabel wearing? What a fright she looks! What a hideous new dress!"—their eyelids flickering as they came up and then their lids shutting rather tight. It was her own appalling inadequacy; her cowardice; her mean, water-sprinkled blood that depressed her. And at once the whole of the room where, for ever so many hours, she had planned with the little dressmaker how it was to go, seemed sordid, repulsive; and her own drawing-

[1]Reprinted from *The Forum* for May, 1927, by permission of Mrs. Woolf and of the editors of *The Forum*.

room so shabby, and herself, going out, puffed up with vanity as she touched the letters on the hall table and said: "How dull!" to show off—all this now seemed unutterably silly, paltry, and provincial. All this had been absolutely destroyed, shown up, exploded, the moment she came into Mrs. Dalloway's drawing-room.

What she had thought that evening when, sitting over the teacups, Mrs. Dalloway's invitation came, was that, of course, she could not be fashionable. It was absurd to pretend it even—fashion meant cut, meant style, meant thirty guineas at least—but why not be original? Why not be herself, anyhow? And, getting up, she had taken that old fashion book of her mother's, a Paris fashion book of the time of the Empire, and had thought how much prettier, more dignified, and more womanly they were then, and so set herself—oh, it was foolish—trying to be like them, pluming herself in fact, upon being modest and old-fashioned and very charming, giving herself up, no doubt about it, to an orgy of self-love, which deserved to be chastised, and so rigged herself out like this.

But she dared not look in the glass. She could not face the whole horror—the pale yellow, idiotically old-fashioned silk dress with its long skirt and its high sleeves and its waist and all the things that looked so charming in the fashion book, but not on her, not among all these ordinary people. She felt like a dressmaker's dummy standing there, for young people to stick pins into.

"But, my dear, it's perfectly charming!" Rose Shaw said, looking her up and down with that little satirical pucker of the lips which she expected—Rose herself being dressed in the height of fashion, precisely like everybody else, always.

We are all like flies trying to crawl over the edge of the saucer, Mabel thought, and repeated the phrase as if she were crossing herself, as if she were trying to find some spell to annul this pain, to make this agony endur-

able. Tags of Shakespeare, lines from books she had read ages ago, suddenly came to her when she was in agony, and she repeated them over and over again. "Flies trying to crawl," she repeated. If she could say that over often enough and make herself see the flies, she would become numb, chill, frozen, dumb. Now she could see flies crawling slowly out of a saucer of milk with their wings stuck together; and she strained and strained (standing in front of the looking-glass, listening to Rose Shaw) to make herself see Rose Shaw and all the other people there as flies, trying to hoist themselves out of something, or into something, meager, insignificant, toiling flies. But she could not see them like that, not other people. She saw herself like that—she was a fly, but the others were dragon-flies, butterflies, beautiful insects, dancing, fluttering, skimming, while she alone dragged herself up out of the saucer. (Envy and spite, the most detestable of the vices, were her chief faults.)

"I feel like some dowdy, decrepit, horribly dingy old fly," she said, making Robert Haydon stop just to hear her say that, just to reassure herself by furbishing up a poor weak-kneed phrase and so showing how detached she was, how witty, that she did not feel in the least out of anything. And, of course, Robert Haydon answered something quite polite, quite insincere, which she saw through instantly, and said to herself, directly he went (again from some book), "Lies, lies, lies!" For a party makes things either much more real, or much less real, she thought; she saw in a flash to the bottom of Robert Haydon's heart; she saw through everything. She saw the truth. *This* was true, this drawing-room, this self, and the other false. Miss Milan's little workroom was really terribly hot, stuffy, sordid. It smelt of clothes and cabbage cooking; and yet, when Miss Milan put the glass in her hand, and she looked at herself with the dress on, finished, an extraordinary bliss shot through her heart. Suf-

fused with light, she sprang into existence. Rid of cares and wrinkles, what she had dreamed of herself was there —a beautiful woman. Just for a second (she had not dared look longer, Miss Milan wanted to know about the length of the skirt), there looked at her, framed in the scrolloping mahogany, a gray-white, mysteriously smiling, charming girl, the core of herself, the soul of herself; and it was not vanity only, not only self-love that made her think it good, tender, and true. Miss Milan said that the skirt could not well be longer; if anything the skirt, said Miss Milan, puckering her forehead, considering with all her wits about her, must be shorter; and she felt, suddenly, honestly, full of love for Miss Milan, much, much fonder of Miss Milan than of any one in the whole world, and could have cried for pity that she should be crawling on the floor with her mouth full of pins, and her face red and her eyes bulging—that one human being should be doing this for another, and she saw them all as human beings merely, and herself going off to her party, and Miss Milan pulling the cover over the canary's cage, or letting him pick a hemp-seed from between her lips, and the thought of it, of this side of human nature and its patience and its endurance and its being content with such miserable, scanty, sordid little pleasures filled her eyes with tears.

And now the whole thing had vanished. The dress, the room, the love, the pity, the scrolloping looking-glass, and the canary's cage—all had vanished, and here she was in a corner of Mrs. Dalloway's drawing-room, suffering tortures, woken wide awake to reality.

But it was all so paltry, weak-blooded, and petty-minded to care so much at her age with two children, to be still so utterly dependent on people's opinions and not have principles or convictions, not to be able to say as other people did, "There's Shakespeare! There's death! We're all weevils in a captain's biscuit,"—or whatever it was that people did say.

She faced herself straight in the glass; she pecked at her left shoulder; she issued out into the room, as if spears were thrown at her yellow dress from all sides. But instead of looking fierce or tragic, as Rose Shaw would have done—Rose would have looked like Boadicea—she looked foolish and self-conscious, and simpered like a schoolgirl and slouched across the room, positively slinking, as if she were a beaten mongrel, and looked at a picture, an engraving. As if one went to a party to look at a picture! Everybody knew why she did it—it was from shame, from humiliation.

"Now the fly's in the saucer," she said to herself, "right in the middle, and can't get out, and the milk," she thought, rigidly staring at the picture, "is sticking its wings together."

"It's so old-fashioned," she said to Charles Burt, making him stop (which by itself he hated) on his way to talk to some one else.

She meant, or she tried to make herself think that she meant, that it was the picture and not her dress that was old-fashioned. And one word of praise, one word of affection from Charles would have made all the difference to her at the moment. If he had only said, "Mabel, you're looking charming to-night!" it would have changed her life. But then she ought to have been truthful and direct. Charles said nothing of the kind, of course. He was malice itself. He always saw through one, especially if one were feeling particularly mean, paltry, or feeble-minded.

"Mabel's got a new dress!" he said, and the poor fly was absolutely shoved into the middle of the saucer. Really, he would like her to drown, she believed. He had no heart, no fundamental kindness, only a veneer of friendliness. Miss Milan was much more real, much kinder. If only one could feel that and stick to it, always. "Why," she asked herself—replying to Charles

much too pertly, letting him see that she was out of temper, or "ruffled" as he called it ("Rather ruffled?" he said and went on to laugh at her with some woman over there)—"Why," she asked herself, "can't I feel one thing always, feel quite sure that Miss Milan is right, and Charles wrong and stick to it, feel sure about the canary and pity and love and not be whipped all around in a second by coming into a room full of people?" It was her odious, weak, vacillating character again, always giving at the critical moment and not being seriously interested in conchology, etymology, botany, archeology, cutting up potatoes and watching them fructify like Mary Dennis, like Violet Searle.

Then Mrs. Holman, seeing her standing there, bore down upon her. Of course a thing like a dress was beneath Mrs. Holman's notice, with her family always tumbling downstairs or having the scarlet fever. Could Mabel tell her if Elmthorpe was ever let for August and September? Oh, it was a conversation that bored her unutterably! It made her furious to be treated like a house agent or messenger boy, to be made use of. Not to have value, that was it, she thought, trying to grasp something hard, something real, while she tried to answer sensibly about the bathroom and the south aspect and the hot water to the top of the house; and all the time she could see little bits of her yellow dress in the round looking-glass which made them all the size of boot-buttons or tadpoles; and it was amazing to think how much humiliation and agony and self-loathing and effort and passionate ups and downs of feeling were contained in a thing the size of a threepenny bit. And what was still odder, this thing, this Mabel Waring, was separate, quite disconnected; and though Mrs. Holman (the black button) was leaning forward and telling her how her eldest boy had strained his heart running, she could see her, too, quite detached in the looking-glass, and it was impossible

that the black dot, leaning forward, gesticulating, should make the yellow dot, sitting solitary, self-centred, feel what the black dot was feeling, yet they pretended.

"So impossible to keep boys quiet"—that was the kind of thing one said.

And Mrs. Holman, who could never get enough sympathy and snatched what little there was greedily, as if it were her right (but she deserved much more for there was her little girl who had come down this morning with a swollen knee-joint), took this miserable offering and looked at it suspiciously, grudgingly, as if it were a halfpenny when it ought to have been a pound and put it away in her purse, must put up with it, mean and miserly though it was, times being hard, so very hard; and on she went, creaking, injured Mrs. Holman, about the girl with the swollen joints. Ah, it was tragic, this greed, this clamor of human beings, like a row of cormorants, barking and flapping their wings for sympathy—it was tragic, could one have felt it and not merely pretended to feel it!

But in her yellow dress to-night she could not wring out one drop more; she wanted it all, all for herself. She knew (she kept on looking into the glass, dipping into that dreadfully showing-up blue pool) that she was condemned, despised, left like this in a backwater, because of her being like this a feeble, vacillating creature; and it seemed to her that the yellow dress was a penance which she had deserved, and if she had been dressed like Rose Shaw, in lovely, clinging green with a ruffle of swansdown, she would have deserved that; and she thought that there was no escape for her—none whatever. But it was not her fault altogether, after all. It was being one of a family of ten; never having money enough, always skimping and paring; and her mother carrying great cans, and the linoleum worn on the stair edges, and one sordid little domestic tragedy after another—nothing catastrophic,

the sheep farm failing, but not utterly; her eldest brother marrying beneath him but not very much—there was no romance, nothing extreme about them all. They petered out respectably in seaside resorts; every watering-place had one of her aunts even now asleep in some lodging with the front windows not quite facing the sea. That was so like them—they had to squint at things always. And she had done the same—she was just like her aunts. For all her dreams of living in India, married to some hero like Sir Henry Lawrence, some empire builder (still the sight of a native in a turban filled her with romance), she had failed utterly. She had married Hubert, with his safe, permanent underling's job in the Law Courts, and they managed tolerably in a smallish house, without proper maids, and hash when she was alone or just bread and butter, but now and then—Mrs. Holman was off, thinking her the most dried-up, unsympathetic twig she had ever met, absurdly dressed, too, and would tell everyone about Mabel's fantastic appearance—now and then, thought Mabel Waring, left alone on the blue sofa, punching the cushion in order to look occupied, for she would not join Charles Burt and Rose Shaw, chattering like magpies and perhaps laughing at her by the fireplace—now and then, there did come to her delicious moments, reading the other night in bed, for instance, or down by the sea on the sand in the sun, at Easter—let her recall it—a great tuft of pale sand-grass standing all twisted like a shock of spears against the sky, which was blue like a smooth china egg, so firm, so hard, and then the melody of the waves—"Hush, hush," they said, and the children's shouts paddling—yes, it was a divine moment, and there she lay, she felt, in the hand of the Goddess who was the world; rather a hard-hearted but very beautiful Goddess, a little lamb on the altar (one did think these silly things, and it didn't matter so long as one never said them).

And also with Hubert sometimes she had quite unexpectedly—carving the mutton for Sunday lunch, for no reason, opening a letter, coming into a room—divine moments, when she said to herself (for she would never say this to anybody else), "This is it. This has happened. This is it!" And the other way about it was equally surprising—that is, when everything was arranged—music, weather, holidays, every reason for happiness was there—then nothing happened at all. One wasn't happy. It was flat, just flat, that was all.

Her wretched self again, no doubt! She had always been a fretful, weak, unsatisfactory mother, a wobbly wife, lolling about in a kind of twilight existence with nothing very clear or very bold or more one thing than another, like all her brothers and sisters, except perhaps Herbert—they were all the same poor water-veined creatures who did nothing. Then in the midst of this creeping, crawling life, suddenly she was on the crest of a wave. That wretched fly—where had she read the story that kept coming into her mind about the fly and the saucer? —struggled out. Yes, she had those moments. But now that she was forty, they might come more and more seldom. By degrees she would cease to struggle any more. But that was deplorable! That was not to be endured! That made her feel ashamed of herself!

She would go to the London Library to-morrow. She would find some wonderful, helpful, astonishing book, quite by chance, a book by a clergyman, by an American no one had ever heard of; or she would walk down the Strand and drop, accidentally, into a hall where a miner was telling about the life in the pit and suddenly she would become a new person. She would be absolutely transformed. She would wear a uniform; she would be called Sister Somebody; she would never give a thought to clothes again. And for ever after she would be perfectly clear about Charles Burt and Miss Milan and this room

and that room; and it would be always, day after day, as if she were lying in the sun or carving the mutton. It would be it!

So she got up from the blue sofa, and the yellow button in the looking-glass got up too, and she waved her hand to Charles and Rose to show them she did not depend on them one scrap, and the yellow button moved out of the looking-glass, and all the spears were gathered into her breast as she walked toward Mrs. Dalloway and said, "Good-night."

"But it's too early to go," said Mrs. Dalloway, who was always so charming.

"I'm afraid I must," said Mabel Waring. "But," she added in her weak, wobbly voice which only sounded ridiculous when she tried to strengthen it, "I have enjoyed myself enormously."

"I have enjoyed myself," she said to Mr. Dalloway, whom she met on the stairs.

"Lies, lies, lies!" she said to herself, going downstairs, and "Right in the saucer!" she said to herself as she thanked Mrs. Barnet for helping her and wrapped herself, round and round and round, in the Chinese cloak she had worn these twenty years.

THE MAN WHO COULD WORK MIRACLES[1]

H. G. Wells

It is doubtful whether the gift was innate. For my own part, I think it came to him suddenly. Indeed, until he was thirty he was a sceptic, and did not believe in miraculous powers. And here, since it is the most convenient place, I must mention that he was a little man, and had eyes of a hot brown, very erect red hair, a moustache with ends that he twisted up, and freckles. His name was George McWirter Fotheringay—not the sort of name by any means to lead to any expectation of miracles—and he was clerk at Gomshott's. He was greatly addicted to assertive argument. It was while he was asserting the impossibility of miracles that he had his first intimation of his extraordinary powers. This particular argument was being held in the bar of the Long Dragon, and Toddy Beamish was conducting the opposition by a monotonous but effective "So *you* say," that drove Mr. Fotheringay to the very limit of his patience.

There were present, besides these two, a very dusty cyclist, landlord Cox, and Miss Maybridge, the perfectly respectable and rather portly barmaid of the Dragon. Miss Maybridge was standing with her back to Mr. Fotheringay, washing glasses; the others were watching him, more or less amused by the present ineffectiveness of the assertive method. Goaded by the Torres Vedras tactics of Mr. Beamish, Mr. Fotheringay determined to make an unusual rhetorical effort. "Looky here, Mr.

[1]Reprinted from *The Country of the Blind,* by H. G. Wells, by permission of the author.

Beamish," said Mr. Fotheringay, "let us clearly understand what a miracle is. It's something done contrariwise to the course of nature, done by power of will, something what couldn't happen without being specially willed."

"So *you* say," said Mr. Beamish, repulsing him.

Mr. Fotheringay appealed to the cyclist, who had hitherto been a silent auditor, and received his assent—given with a hesitating cough and a glance at Mr. Beamish. The landlord would express no opinion, and Mr. Fotheringay, returning to Mr. Beamish, received the unexpected concession of a qualified assent to his definition of a miracle.

"For instance," said Mr. Fotheringay, greatly encouraged, "here would be a miracle. That lamp, in the natural course of things, couldn't burn like that upsy-down, could it, Beamish?"

"*You* say it couldn't," said Beamish.

"And you?" said Fotheringay. "You don't mean to say—eh?"

"No," said Beamish reluctantly. "No, it couldn't."

"Very well," said Mr. Fotheringay. "Then here comes someone, as it might be me, along here, and stands, as it might be here, and says to that lamp, as I might do, collecting all my will—'Turn upsy-down without breaking, and go on burning steady, and'—hullo!"

It was enough to make anyone say "Hullo!" The impossible, the incredible, was visible to them all. The lamp hung inverted in the air, its flame pointing down. It was as solid, as indisputable as ever a lamp was, the prosaic common lamp of the Long Dragon bar.

Mr. Fotheringay stood with an extended forefinger and the knitted brows of one anticipating a catastrophic smash. The cyclist, who was sitting next the lamp, ducked and jumped across the bar. Miss Maybridge turned and screamed. For nearly three seconds the lamp

remained still. A faint cry of mental distress came from Mr. Fotheringay. "I can't keep it up," he said, "any longer." He staggered back, and the inverted lamp suddenly flared, fell against the corner of the bar, bounced aside, smashed upon the floor, and went out.

It was lucky it had a metal receiver, or the whole place would have been in a blaze. Mr. Cox was the first to speak, and his remark, shorn of needless excrescences, was to the effect that Fotheringay was a fool. Fotheringay was beyond disputing even so fundamental a proposition as that! He was astonished beyond measure at the thing that had occurred. The subsequent conversation threw absolutely no light on the matter so far as Fotheringay was concerned; the general opinion not only followed Mr. Cox very closely but very vehemently. Everyone accused Fotheringay of a silly trick, and presented him to himself as a foolish destroyer of comfort and security. His mind was in a tornado of perplexity, he was himself inclined to agree with them, and he made a remarkably ineffectual opposition to the proposal of his departure.

He went home flushed and heated, coat-collar crumpled, eyes smarting and ears red. He watched each of the ten street lamps nervously as he passed it. It was only when he found himself alone in his little bedroom in Church Row that he was able to grapple seriously with his memories of the occurrence, and ask, "What on earth happened?"

He had removed his coat and boots, and was sitting on the bed with his hands in his pockets repeating the text of his defense for the seventeenth time, "I didn't want the confounded thing to upset," when it occurred to him that at the precise moment he had said the commanding words he had inadvertently willed the thing he said, and that when he had seen the lamp in the air he had felt that it depended on him to maintain it there without being par-

ticularly clear how this was to be done. He had not a particularly complex mind, or he might have stuck for a time at that "inadvertently willed," embracing, as it does, the abstrusest problems of voluntary action; but as it was, the idea came to him with a quite acceptable haziness. And from that, following, as I must admit, no clear logical path, he came to the test of experiment.

He pointed resolutely to his candle and collected his mind, though he felt he did a foolish thing. "Be raised up," he said. But in a second that feeling vanished. The candle was raised, hung in the air one giddy moment, and as Mr. Fotheringay gasped, fell with a smash on his toilet table, leaving him in darkness save for the expiring glow of its wick.

For a time Mr. Fotheringay sat in darkness, perfectly still. "It did happen after all," he said. "And 'ow I'm to explain it I *don't* know." He sighed heavily, and began feeling in his pockets for a match. He could find none, and he rose and groped about the toilet table. "I wish I had a match," he said. He resorted to his coat, and there was none there, and then it dawned upon him that miracles were possible even in the dark. "Let there be a match in that hand," he said. He felt some light object fall across his palm and his fingers closed upon a match.

After several ineffectual attempts to light this, he discovered it was a safety match. He threw it down, and then it occurred to him that he might have willed it lit. He did, and perceived it burning in the midst of his toilet table mat. He caught it up hastily, and it went out. His perception of possibilities enlarged, and he felt for and replaced the candle in its candlestick. "Here! *you* be lit," said Mr. Fotheringay, and forthwith the candle was flaring, and he saw a little black hole in the toilet-cover, with a wisp of smoke rising from it. For a time he stared from this to the little flame and back, and then looked up

and met his own gaze in the looking-glass. By this help he communed with himself in silence for a time.

"How about miracles now?" said Mr. Fotheringay at last, addressing his reflection.

The subsequent meditations of Mr. Fotheringay were of a severe but confused description. So far, he could see it was a case of pure willing with him. The nature of his experiences so far disinclined him for any further experiments, at least until he had reconsidered them. But he lifted a sheet of paper, and turned a glass of water pink and then green, and he created a snail which he miraculously annihilated, and got himself a miraculous new toothbrush. Somewhere in the small hours he had reached the fact that his will-power must be of a particularly rare and pungent quality, a fact of which he had indeed had inklings before, but no certain assurance. The scare and perplexity of his first discovery was now qualified by pride in this evidence of singularity and by vague intimations of advantage. He became aware that the church clock was striking one, and as it did not occur to him that his daily duties at Gomshott's might be miraculously dispensed with, he resumed undressing, in order to get to bed without further delay. As he struggled to get his shirt over his head, he was struck with a brilliant idea. "Let me be in bed," he said, and found himself so. "Undressed," he stipulated; and, finding the sheets cold, added hastily, "and in my nightshirt—no, in a nice soft woolen nightshirt. Ah!" he said with immense enjoyment. "And now let me be comfortably asleep. . . ."

He awoke at his usual hour and was pensive all through breakfast time, wondering whether his over-night experience might not be a particularly vivid dream. At length his mind turned again to cautious experiments. For instance, he had three eggs for breakfast; two his landlady had supplied, good but shoppy, and one was a delicious

fresh goose-egg, laid, cooked, and served by his extraordinary will. He hurried off to Gomshott's in a state of profound but carefully concealed excitement, and only remembered the shell of the third egg when his landlady spoke of it that night. All day he could do no work because of this astonishing new self-knowledge, but this caused him no inconvenience, because he made up for it miraculously in his last ten minutes.

As the day wore on his state of mind passed from wonder to elation, albeit the circumstances of his dismissal from the Long Dragon were still disagreeable to recall, and a garbled account of the matter that had reached his colleagues led to some badinage. It was evident he must be careful how he lifted frangible objects, but in other ways his gift promised more and more as he turned it over in his mind. He intended among other things to increase his personal property by unostentatious acts of creation. He called into existence a pair of very splendid diamond studs, and hastily annihilated them again as young Gomshott came across the countinghouse to his desk. He was afraid young Gomshott might wonder how he had come by them. He saw quite clearly the gift required caution and watchfulness in its exercise, but so far as he could judge the difficulties attending its mastery would be no greater than those he had already faced in the study of cycling. It was that analogy, perhaps, quite as much as the feeling that he would be unwelcome in the Long Dragon that drove him out after supper into the lane beyond the gasworks, to rehearse a few miracles in private.

There was possibly a certain want of originality in his attempts, for, apart from his will-power, Mr. Fotheringay was not a very exceptional man. The miracle of Moses' rod came to his mind, but the night was dark and unfavorable to the proper control of large miraculous snakes. Then he recollected the story of "Tannhauser" that he had read on the back of the Philharmonic program.

That seemed to him singularly attractive and harmless. He stuck his walking-stick—a very nice Poona-Penang lawyer—into the turf that edged the footpath, and commanded the dry wood to blossom. The air was immediately full of the scent of roses, and by means of a match he saw for himself that this beautiful miracle was indeed accomplished. His satisfaction was ended by advancing footsteps. Afraid of a premature discovery of his powers, he addressed the blossoming stick hastily: "Go back!" What he meant was "Change back," but of course he was confused. The stick receded at a considerable velocity, and incontinently came a cry of anger and a bad word from the approaching person. "Who are you throwing brambles at, you fool?" cried a voice. "That got me in the shin."

"I'm sorry, old chap," said Mr. Fotheringay, and then, realizing the awkward nature of the explanation, caught nervously at his moustache. He saw Winch, one of the three Immering constables, advancing.

"What d'yer mean by it?" asked the constable. "Hullo! It's you, is it? The gent that broke the lamp at the Long Dragon!"

"I don't mean anything by it," said Mr. Fotheringay. "Nothing at all."

"What d'yer do it for then?"

"Oh, bother!" said Mr. Fotheringay.

"Bother indeed! D'yer know that stick hurt? What d'yer do it for, eh?"

For the moment Mr. Fotheringay could not think what he had done it for. His silence seemed to irritate Mr. Winch. "You've been assaulting the police, young man, this time. That's what *you* done."

"Look here, Mr. Winch," said Mr. Fotheringay, annoyed and confused, "I'm sorry, very. The fact is——"

"Well?"

He could think of no way but the truth. "I was work-

ing a miracle." He tried to speak in an off-hand way, but try as he would he couldn't.

"Working a—— 'Ere, don't you talk rot. Working a miracle, indeed! Miracle! Well, that's downright funny! Why, you's the chap that don't believe in miracles. . . . Fact is, this is another of your silly conjuring tricks—that's what this is. Now, I tell you——"

But Mr. Fotheringay never heard what Mr. Winch was going to tell him. He realized that he had given himself away, flung his valuable secret to all the winds of heaven. A violent gust of irritation swept him to action. "Here," he said, "I've had enough of this, I have! I'll show you a silly conjuring trick, I will! Go to Hades! Go, now!"

He was alone!

Mr. Fotheringay performed no more miracles that night, nor did he trouble to see what had become of his flowering stick. He returned to the town, scared and very quiet, and went to his bedroom. "Lord!" he said, "it's a powerful gift—an extremely powerful gift. I didn't hardly mean as much as that. Not really. . . . I wonder what Hades is like."

He sat on the bed taking off his boots. Struck by a happy thought, he transferred the constable to San Francisco, and without any more interference with normal causation went soberly to bed. In the night he dreamt of the anger of Winch.

The next day Mr. Fotheringay heard two interesting items of news. Someone had planted a most beautiful climbing rose against the elder Mr. Gomshott's private house in the Lullaborough Road, and the river as far as Rawling's Mill was to be dragged for Constable Winch.

Mr. Fotheringay was abstracted and thoughtful all that day, and performed no miracles except certain provisions for Winch and the miracle of completing his day's work with punctual perfection in spite of all the bee-swarm of thoughts that hummed through his mind. And the

extraordinary abstraction and meekness of his manner was remarked by several people, and made a matter for jesting. For the most part he was thinking of Winch.

On Sunday evening he went to chapel, and oddly enough, Mr. Maydig, who took a certain interest in occult matters, preached about "Things that are not lawful." Mr. Fotheringay was not a regular chapel-goer, but the system of assertive skepticism, to which I have already alluded, was now very much shaken. The tenor of the sermon threw an entirely new light on these novel gifts, and he suddenly decided to consult Mr. Maydig immediately after the service. So soon as that was determined, he found himself wondering why he had not done so before.

Mr. Maydig, a lean, excitable man with quite remarkably long wrists and neck, was gratified at a request for a private conversation from a young man whose carelessness in religious matters was a subject for general remark in the town. After a few necessary delays, he conducted him to the study of the manse, which was contiguous to the chapel, seated him comfortably, and, standing in front of the cheerful fire—his legs threw a Rhodian arch of shadows on the opposite wall—requested Mr. Fotheringay to state his business.

At first Mr. Fotheringay was a little abashed, and found some difficulty in opening the matter. "You will scarcely believe me, Mr. Maydig, I am afraid"—and so forth for some time. He tried a question at last, and asked Mr. Maydig his opinion of miracles.

Mr. Maydig was still saying "Well" in an extremely judicial tone, when Mr. Fotheringay interrupted again.

"You don't believe, I suppose, that some common sort of person—like myself, for instance—as it might be sitting here now, might have some sort of twist inside him that made him able to do things by his will."

"It's possible," said Mr. Maydig. "Something of the sort, perhaps, is possible."

"If I might make free with something here, I think I might show you by a sort of experiment," said Mr. Fotheringay. "Now, take that tobacco jar on the table, for instance. What I want to know is whether what I am going to do with it is a miracle or not. Just half a minute, Mr. Maydig, please."

He knitted his brows, pointed to the tobacco jar, and said, "Be a bowl of vi'lets."

The tobacco jar did as it was ordered.

Mr. Maydig started violently at the change, and stood looking from the thaumaturgist to the bowl of flowers. He said nothing. Presently he ventured to lean over the table and smell the violets; they were fresh-picked and very fine ones. Then he stared at Mr. Fotheringay again.

"How did you do that?" he asked.

Mr. Fotheringay pulled his moustache. "Just told it—and there you are. Is that a miracle, or is it black art, or what is it? And what do you think's the matter with me? That's what I want to ask."

"It's a most extraordinary occurrence."

"And this day last week I knew no more that I could do things like that than you did. It came quite sudden. It's something odd about my will, I suppose, and that's as far as I can see."

"Is that—the only thing? Could you do other things besides that?"

"Lord, yes!" said Mr. Fotheringay. "Just anything." He thought and suddenly recalled a conjuring entertainment he had seen. "Here!" he pointed, "change into a bowl of fish—no, not that!—change into a glass bowl full of water with goldfish swimming in it. That's better! You see that, Mr. Maydig?"

"It's astonishing! It's incredible! You are either a most extraordinary . . . But no——"

"I could change it into anything," said Mr. Fotheringay. "Just anything. Here! be a pigeon, will you?"

In another moment a blue pigeon was fluttering around the room and making Mr. Maydig duck every time it came near him. "Stop there, will you?" said Mr. Fotheringay; and the pigeon hung motionless in the air. "I could change it back into a bowl of flowers," he said, and after replacing the pigeon on the table worked that miracle. "I expect you will want your pipe in a bit," he said, and restored the tobacco-jar.

Mr. Maydig had followed all these later changes in a sort of ejaculatory silence. He stared at Mr. Fotheringay and in a very gingerly manner picked up the tobacco-jar, examined it, replaced it on the table. "Well!" was the only expression of his feelings.

"Now, after that, it's easier to explain what I came about," said Mr. Fotheringay; and proceeded to a lengthy and involved narrative of his strange experiences, beginning with the affair of the lamp in the Long Dragon and complicated by persistent allusions to Winch. As he went on, the transient pride Mr. Maydig's consternation had caused passed away; he became the very ordinary Mr. Fotheringay of everyday intercourse again. Mr. Maydig listened intently, the tobacco-jar in his hand, and his bearing changed also with the course of the narrative. Presently, while Mr. Fotheringay was dealing with the miracle of the third egg, the minister interrupted with a fluttering, extended hand.

"It is possible," he said. "It is credible. It is amazing, of course, but it reconciles a number of amazing difficulties. The power to work miracles is a gift—a peculiar quality like genius or second sight; hitherto it has come very rarely and to exceptional people. But in this case—I have always wondered at the miracles of Mahomet, and at Yogi's miracles, and the miracles of Madame Blavatsky. But, of course—— Yes, it is simply a gift! It

carries out so beautifully the arguments of that great thinker"—Mr. Maydig's voice sank—"his Grace, the Duke of Argyll. Here we plumb some profounder law —deeper than the laws of ordinary nature. Yes—yes. Go on. Go on!"

Mr. Fotheringay proceeded to tell of his misadventure with Winch, and Mr. Maydig, no longer overawed or scared, began to jerk his limbs about and interject astonishment. "It's this what troubles me most," proceeded Mr. Fotheringay; "it's this I'm most imijitly in want of advice for; of course he's at San Francisco—wherever San Francisco may be—but of course it's awkward for both of us, as you'll see, Mr. Maydig. I don't see how he can understand what has happened, and I daresay he's scared and exasperated something tremendous, and trying to get at me. I daresay he keeps on starting off to come here. I send him back, by a miracle, every few hours, when I think of it. And, of course, that's a thing he won't be able to understand, and it's bound to annoy him; and, of course, if he takes a ticket every time it will cost him a lot of money. I done the best I could for him, but, of course, it's difficult for him to put himself in my place. I thought afterward that his clothes might have got scorched, you know—if Hades is all it's supposed to be—before I shifted him. In that case I suppose they'd have locked him up in San Francisco. Of course I willed him a new suit of clothes on him directly I thought of it. But, you see, I'm already in a deuce of a tangle——"

Mr. Maydig looked serious. "I see you are in a tangle. Yes, it's a difficult position. How you are to end it . . ." He became diffuse and inconclusive.

"However, we'll leave Winch for a little and discuss the larger question. I don't think this is a case of the black art or anything of the sort. I don't think there is any taint of criminality about it at all, Mr. Fotheringay —none whatever, unless you are suppressing material

facts. No, it's miracles—pure miracles—miracles, if I may say so, of the very highest order."

He began to pace the hearthrug and gesticulate, while Mr. Fotheringay sat with his arm on the table and his head on his arm, looking worried. "I don't see how I'm to manage about Winch," he said.

"A gift of working miracles—apparently a very powerful gift," said Mr. Maydig, "will find a way about Winch, never fear. My dear sir, you are a most important man—a man of the most astonishing possibilities. As evidence, for example! And in other ways, the things you may do . . ."

"Yes, *I've* thought of a thing or two," said Mr. Fotheringay. "But—some of the things came a bit twisty. You saw that fish at first? Wrong sort of bowl and wrong sort of fish. And I thought I'd ask someone."

"A proper course," said Mr. Maydig, "a very proper course—altogether the proper course." He stopped and looked at Mr. Fotheringay. "It's practically an unlimited gift. Let us test your powers, for instance. If they really *are* . . . If they really are all they seem to be."

And so, incredible as it may seem, in the study of the little house behind the Congregational Chapel, on the evening of Sunday, November 10, 1896, Mr. Fotheringay, egged on and inspired by Mr. Maydig, began to work miracles. The reader's attention is specially and definitely called to the date. He will object, probably has already objected, that certain points in this story are improbable, that if any things of the sort already described had indeed occurred, they would have been in all the papers at that time. The details immediately following he will find particularly hard to accept, because among other things they involve the conclusion that he or she, the reader in question, must have been killed in a violent and unprecedented manner in 1896. In the subsequent course of this story that will become perfectly clear and credible,

as every rightminded and reasonable reader will admit. But this is not the place for the end of the story, being but little beyond the hither side of the middle. And at first the miracles worked by Mr. Fotheringay were timid little miracles—little things with the cups and parlor fitments, as feeble as the miracles of Theosophists, and, feeble as they were, they were received with awe by his collaborator. He would have preferred to settle the Winch business out of hand, but Mr. Maydig would not let him. But after they had worked a dozen domestic trivialities, their sense of power grew, their imagination began to show signs of stimulation, and their ambition enlarged. Their first larger enterprise was due to hunger and the negligence of Mr. Maydig's housekeeper. The meal to which the minister conducted Mr. Fotheringay was certainly ill-laid and uninviting as refreshment for two industrious miracle-workers; but they were seated, and Mr. Maydig was descanting in sorrow rather than in anger upon his housekeeper's shortcomings, before it occurred to Mr. Fotheringay that an opportunity lay before him.

"Don't you think, Mr. Maydig," he said, "if it isn't a liberty——"

"My dear Mr. Fotheringay! Of course! No—I didn't think."

Mr. Fotheringay waved his hand. "What shall we have?" he said, in a large, inclusive spirit, and, at Mr. Maydig's order, revised the supper very thoroughly. "As for me," he said, eyeing Mr. Maydig's selection, "I am always particularly fond of a tankard of stout and a nice Welsh rarebit, and I'll order that. I ain't much given to Burgundy," and forthwith stout and Welsh rarebit promptly appeared at his command. They sat long at their supper, talking like equals, as Mr. Fotheringay presently perceived, with a glow of satisfaction and surprise, of all the miracles they would presently do. "And,

by-the-by, Mr. Maydig," said Mr. Fotheringay, "I might perhaps be able to help you—in a domestic way."

"Don't quite follow," said Mr. Maydig, pouring out a glass of miraculous old Burgundy.

Mr. Fotheringay helped himself to a second Welsh rarebit out of vacancy, and took a mouthful. "I was thinking," he said, "I might be able (*chum, chum*) to work (*chum, chum*) a miracle with Mrs. Minchen (*chum, chum*)—make her a better woman."

Mr. Maydig put down the glass and looked doubtful. "She's—— She strongly objects to interference, you know, Mr. Fotheringay. And—as a matter of fact—it's well past eleven, and she's probably in bed and asleep. Do you think, on the whole——"

Mr. Fotheringay considered these objections. "I don't see that it shouldn't be done in her sleep."

For a time Mr. Maydig opposed the idea, and then he yielded. Mr. Fotheringay issued his orders, and a little less at their ease, perhaps, the two gentlemen proceeded with their repast. Mr. Maydig was enlarging on the changes he might expect in his housekeeper next day, with an optimism that seemed even to Mr. Fotheringay's supper senses a little forced and hectic, when a series of confused noises from upstairs began. Their eyes exchanged interrogations, and Mr. Maydig left the room hastily. Mr. Fotheringay heard him calling up to his housekeeper and then his footsteps going softly up to her.

In a minute or so the minister returned, his step light, his face radiant. "Wonderful!" he said, "and touching! Most touching!"

He began pacing the hearthrug. "A repentance—a most touching repentance—through the crack of the door. Poor woman! A most wonderful change! She had got up. She must have got up at once. She had got up out of her sleep to smash a private bottle of brandy in her box. And to confess to it too! . . . But this gives us—

it opens—a most amazing vista of possibilities. If we can work this miraculous change in *her* . . ."

"The thing's unlimited seemingly," said Mr. Fotheringay. "And about Mr. Winch——"

"Altogether unlimited." And from the hearthrug Mr. Maydig, waving aside the Winch difficulty, unfolded a series of wonderful proposals—proposals he invented as he went along.

Now what those proposals were does not concern the essentials of this story. Suffice it that they were designed in a spirit of infinite benevolence, the sort of benevolence that used to be called post-prandial. Suffice it, too, that the problem of Winch remained unsolved. Nor is it necessary to describe how far that series got to its fulfilment. There were astonishing changes. The small hours found Mr. Maydig and Mr. Fotheringay careering across the chilly market square under the still moon, in a sort of ecstasy of thaumaturgy, Mr. Maydig all flap and gesture, Mr. Fotheringay short and bristling and no longer abashed at his greatness. They had reformed every drunkard in the Parliamentary division, changed all the beer and alcohol to water (Mr. Maydig had overruled Mr. Fotheringay on this point); they had, further, greatly improved the railway communication of the place, drained Flinder's swamp, improved the soil of One Tree Hill, and cured the vicar's wart. And they were going to see what could be done with the injured pier at South Bridge.

"The place," gasped Mr. Maydig, "won't be the same place to-morrow. How surprised and thankful everyone will be!" And just at that moment the church clock struck three.

"I say," said Mr. Fotheringay, "that's three o'clock! I must be getting back. I've got to be at business by eight. And, besides, Mrs. Wimms——"

"We're only beginning," said Mr. Maydig, full of the

sweetness of unlimited power. "We're only beginning. Think of all the good we're doing. When people wake——"

"But——" said Mr. Fotheringay.

Mr. Maydig gripped his arm suddenly. His eyes were bright and wild. "My dear chap," he said, "there's no hurry. Look"—he pointed to the moon at the zenith—"Joshua!"

"Joshua?" said Mr. Fotheringay.

"Joshua," said Mr. Maydig. "Why not? Stop it."

Mr. Fotheringay looked at the moon. "That's a bit tall," he said after a pause.

"Why not?" said Mr. Maydig. "Of course it doesn't stop. You stop the rotation of the earth, you know. Time stops. It isn't as if we were doing harm."

"H'm!" said Mr. Fotheringay. "Well," he sighed, "I'll try. Here!"

He buttoned up his jacket and addressed himself to the habitable globe, with as good an assumption of confidence as lay in his power. "Jest stop rotating, will you?" said Mr. Fotheringay.

Incontinently he was flying head over heels through the air at the rate of dozens of miles a minute. In spite of the innumerable circles he was describing per second, he thought; for thought is wonderful—sometimes as sluggish as flowing pitch, sometimes as instantaneous as light. He thought in a second, and willed.

"Let me come down safe and sound. Whatever else happens, let me down safe and sound."

He willed it only just in time, for his clothes, heated by his rapid flight, were already beginning to singe. He came down with a forcible, but by no means injurious, bump in what appeared to be a mound of fresh-turned earth. A large mass of metal and masonry, extraordinarily like the clock-tower in the middle of the market square, hit the earth near him, ricocheted over him, and flew into stone-

work, bricks, and cement, like a bursting bomb. A hurtling cow hit one of the larger blocks and smashed like an egg. There was a crash that made all the most violent crashes of his past life seem like the sound of falling dust, and this was followed by a descending series of lesser crashes. A vast wind roared throughout earth and heaven, so that he could scarcely lift his head to look. For a while he was too breathless and astonished even to see where he was or what had happened. And his first movement was to feel his head and reassure himself that his streaming hair was still his own.

"Lord!" gasped Mr. Fotheringay, scarce able to speak for the gale. "I've had a squeak! What's gone wrong? Storms and thunder. And only a minute ago a fine night. It's Maydig set me on to this sort of thing. *What* a wind! If I go on fooling in this way I'm bound to have a thundering accident! . . .

"Where's Maydig?

"What a confounded mess everything's in!"

He looked about him so far as his flapping jacket would permit. The appearance of things was really extremely strange. "The sky's all right, anyhow," said Mr. Fotheringay. "And that's about all that is all right. And even there it looks like a terrific gale coming up. But there's the moon overhead. Just as it was just now. Bright as midday. But as for the rest—— Where's the village? Where's—where's anything? And what on earth set this wind a-blowin'? I didn't order no wind."

Mr. Fotheringay struggled to get to his feet in vain, and after one failure, remained on all fours, holding on. He surveyed the moonlit world to leeward, with the tails of his jacket streaming over his head. "There's something seriously wrong," said Mr. Fotheringay. "And what it is—goodness knows!"

Far and wide nothing was visible through the white

glare in the haze of dust that drove before a screaming gale but tumbled masses of earth and heaps of inchoate ruins, no trees, no houses, no familiar shapes, only a wilderness of disorder, vanishing at last into the darkness beneath the whirling columns and streamers, the lightnings and thunders of a swiftly rising storm. Near him in the livid glare was something that might once have been an elm tree, a smashed mass of splinters, shivered from boughs to base, and further a twisted mass of iron girders —only too evidently the viaduct—rose out of the piled confusion.

You see, when Mr. Fotheringay had arrested the rotation of the solid globe, he had made no stipulation concerning the trifling movables upon its surface. And the earth spins so fast that the surface at its equator is traveling at rather more than a thousand miles an hour, and in these latitudes at more than half that pace. So that the village, and Mr. Maydig, and Mr. Fotheringay, and everybody and everything had been jerked violently forward at about nine miles per second—that is to say, much more violently than if they had been fired out of a cannon. And every human being, every living creature, every house, and every tree—all the world as we know it—had been so jerked and smashed and utterly destroyed. That was all.

These things Mr. Fotheringay did not, of course, fully appreciate. But he perceived that his miracle had miscarried, and with that a great disgust of miracles came upon him. He was in darkness now, for the clouds had swept together and blotted out his momentary glimpse of the moon, and the air was full of fitful struggling tortured wraiths of hail. A great roaring of wind and waters filled the earth and sky, and peering under his hand through the dust and sleet to windward, he saw by the play of the lightnings a vast wall of water pouring toward him.

"Maydig!" screamed Mr. Fotheringay's feeble voice amid the elemental uproar. "Here!—Maydig!"

"Stop!" cried Mr. Fotheringay to the advancing water. "Oh, for goodness' sake, stop!"

"Just a moment," said Mr. Fotheringay to the lightnings and thunder. "Stop jest a moment while I collect my thoughts. . . . And now what shall I do?" he said. "What *shall* I do? Lord! I wish Maydig was about."

"I know," said Mr. Fotheringay. "And for goodness' sake, let's have it right *this* time."

He remained on all fours, leaning against the wind, very intent to have everything all right.

"Ah!" he said. "Let nothing what I'm going to order happen till I say 'Off!'. . . . Lord! I wish I'd thought of that before!"

He lifted his little voice against the whirlwind, shouting louder and louder in the vain desire to hear himself speak.

"Now then!—— Here goes! Mind about that what I said just now. In the first place, when all I've got to say is done, let me lose my miraculous power, let my will become just like anybody else's will, and all these dangerous miracles be stopped. I don't like them. I'd rather I didn't work 'em. Ever so much. That's the first thing. And the second is—let me be back just before the miracles begin; let everything be just as it was before that blessed lamp turned up. It's a big job, but it's the last. Have you got it? No more miracles, everything as it was before—me back in the Long Dragon just before I drank off my half-pint. That's it! Yes."

He dug his fingers into the mould, closed his eyes and said, "Off!"

Everything became perfectly still. He perceived that he was standing erect.

"So *you* say," said a voice.

He opened his eyes. He was in the bar of the Long Dragon, arguing about miracles with Toddy Beamish.

He had a vague sense of some great thing forgotten that instantaneously passed. You see that, except for the loss of his miraculous powers, everything was back just as it had been, his mind and memory therefore were now just as they had been at the time when this story began. So that he knew absolutely nothing of all that is told here—knows nothing of all that is told here to this day. And among other things, of course, he still did not believe in miracles.

"I tell you that miracles, properly speaking, can't possibly happen," he said, "whatever you like to hold. And I'm prepared to prove it up to the hilt."

"That's what *you* think," said Toddy Beamish, and "Prove it if you can."

"Looky here, Mr. Beamish," said Mr. Fotheringay. "Let us clearly understand what a miracle is. It's something contrariwise to the course of nature done by the power of Will. . . ."

"ARAB STUFF"[1]

Wilbur Daniel Steele

For the hour I shone; and to say that one shines, if only by the company one keeps, on the terrace of the St. George at Algiers is to say no little thing, for is it not one of the marked night-stops on the world's caravan-route of the notable? Statesmen and the sons of kings, millionaires and adventurers and the Honorable the Lady Blankness, eagles and moths a-wing under the clustered lights or roosting in the shadows on the terrace outside—even in that company I shone for an hour in the light of my friends, a light doubly bright in that it had about it no glitter of hereditary title, no attitude, no pomp. The fame of my two companions was soundly won of themselves, essentially democratic, romantically American.

"You Americans! (How often I have heard it with a small self-conscious grin.) You can do anything! Anything!"

Four years ago the wholesome, girl-figured woman beside me had been a stenographer in a New Jersey building concern—Flo Danger even then. How many have imagined that? It seems incredible that it is not a screen-name. . . . As for Braun, six years ago Braun had been handling boxes in an Oklahoma freightyard.

"You Americans!" To-night, for one person who would have recognized the king's son or the statesman on the street, there were a hundred who knew the name and genius of the scenario-author, the producer of "A Man

[1]Reprinted from *The Shame Dance,* by Wilbur Daniel Steele, by permission of and arrangement with the author, Harper & Brothers, and the editors of *Harper's Magazine.*

May Be Down," "The Light of the West," and "The Dangers of 'Danger.'" And for one who may have been acquainted with the lineaments of the Honorable the Lady Blankness, how many in the world were the tens of thousands who had the likeness of Flo Danger in their poor, romance-starved, happiness-grasping human hearts?

She was something beyond tongue and race and creed. As no emperor or messiah, her calcium creature was present to all men, in Nome and Madagascar, in Sioux City and Hong Kong. Night by night, she and Braun spread on ten thousand screens the Word of the West. In black lands held bound in the never-neverness of fatalism they carried the high, cold, bracing wind of the gospel of a hopeful optimism. They made new tidings of worn things: "Honesty is the best policy," "Where there's life there's hope," and "Virtue is its own reward." . . . Not only its own reward but its own defense, for who can ever doubt that who has watched Flo Danger, week in, week out, passing through the nets of a hundred conspiracies, Chinese Tong plots, Hindoo stratagems, Bolshevik revenges, Red Indian raids—passing unscathed and unarmed, save for the buckler of her wholesome girlhood, the serene quick wit of innocence; and (I saw it lying in her lap there to-night) the famous ivory-handled automatic concealed in the famous lizard-skin purse?

Of course, not even the untutored Malay is going quite to believe that tender girl flesh can be repeatedly flung over cliffs and trampled under buffalo stampedes without being the worse for it in time; but after all he needn't. After all, it is only a symbol, and in any religion it is the symbol that matters.

"I shall die, and in the following Episode (coming Saturday, 3:30, 7:30 and 9:00 P. M.) I shall rise again."

I needed that philosophy. I needed those two as the mill-sail needs new wind. After months of a world of veiled, shamed women down in the interior, where the soul

goes to sleep in filth, sloth, forgetfulness, monotony, and space, I needed the straight look of a home girl's eyes. After months of dealing with pompous and petty French colonial officialdom, I needed Braun's boyish outburst: "Well, then, just let one of 'em take seventeen of his French francs into any market to-day and try to buy one good round E Pluribus Unum. That's where he'll find out where *they* get off at!" . . . It wasn't boasting; it was only his exuberance.

There was to-night about those two an aura of even added romance, for it was to-day that they had returned from the desert, into which they had descended, unguarded and alone. And, what was more in the ear of the world, absolutely unchaperoned! (I was perhaps the only man in North Africa who knew that they were husband and wife.) Yet all this consciousness of the interest they evoked seemed to roll off like the water from the duck's back. Had I been asked that evening, and had I not known them, I should have said they were a boy and a girl just graduated from some Middle-western college, chock-full of the joy that succeeds, and all ready to go out with a laugh and a clap on its shoulder to set straight the thinking of the world.

That, of course, was what they were, a boy and a girl from Freedom's Land, laughing in the face of Old Man Africa. And that, of course, was precisely why I needed them.

"And how did you come on in the south?" I asked them. "Get your 'backgrounds' all right?"

Braun slid farther down into his chair, making a mound of his shirt-bosom. He looked at Flo and she looked at him. There was a moment of tragic communing. Then Flo giggled. Braun grinned.

"We're ruined."

They both began to talk at once with the eagerness of children.

"We've wasted one whole lovely month of our lives——"

"To say nothing of putting the skids under the grandest little film that ever germ-ey-nated in the brain of man."

Their mood of mental and physical relaxation grew hilarious when they talked about it. After all, *one* failure, to the sort of people who know that in the sum-total of things they are bound to succeed, one failure is a joke.

"If only," sighed Flo, "if only, Arno, you'd had enough sense to keep away!" And turning to me: "He had a grand film to do. Honest, it would have gone huge, and I know. Full of striped tents and city gates and camels and rugs and harems and sheiks with cruel eyes and a good wholesome American girl and . . . and . . . and sand. . . ."

Braun threw back his head and exploded: "Sand!"

Flo turned her brimming eyes. "We haven't found enough sand to——"

"No," I said, "you'd have done better for sand down Egypt way."

"Or in Los Angeles."

"No, by crime!" Braun brought his fist down with a sudden violence on the arm of his chair. "No, Flo, I tell you again, *that's* the trouble with American art. And that's what I, for one, want to shake clear of. It don't seem to me we'll ever get anywhere until we go in for the real. Of course, we could have done it out there on the Coast; we had everything, props, sets, people; but what I didn't have and what Flo didn't have was the—the—— Oh, damn it! the *breath* of the thing—the——"

Laughter came out of Flo's full-rounded white throat.

"For goodness sakes, Arno, don't! *Don't look like William Farnum!* . . . He's got into a frightful habit lately of looking like people," she confided. "I wish you could have seen the chest on him when he tore up the governor-general's safe-conduct."

"What's this?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. Addressed to all officers, civil and military, and sheiks, too, with a red seal. . . . You might at least have saved it for a prop, Arno. . . . But no, when we got ready to push off from El Kantara down there, nothing would do but he must tear it all up in little bits—and you know that what-the-hell look of Doug Fairbanks——"

Braun picked up the challenge.

"Well, then, if you want to put it that way, what the hell? How much realism do you think we'd get turning up at this sheik, Muley Kaf's, with a don't-you-dare-touch-these-folks from the governor? Look here, old man, to make it concrete: one of the things I was after was the feelings a man, a regular clean-minded American fellow, would have, getting by secret into a harem."

I suppose he saw my eyes open. His strong chin came forward.

"Yes, that's what I aimed to do. That's what I *have* done."

"And as for Flo," he went on, while Flo put both hands tight over her mouth, "Flo's job was to get the sensations of a good, quick-witted, wholesome American girl in the power of an Arab sheik——"

Flo could not stand it any longer. She would have strangled.

"And—and—*I have been.* Oh, it's too killing! But, no—Arno—oh, man, go on and lead up to it!"

Braun had the saving sense to grin.

"Well, we started out into the wild Aures on a couple of mules."

So there, at the very launching, was disillusionment. "Missouri mules!" They had been told that, if anywhere they were to find the reality of Barbary, it would be in the back valleys of the stark *massif* of the Aures. And now, not a wink of a camel from beginning to end.

"And when I think of the thousands of dollars it's costing me to hire and feed those ships of the desert out on the Coast!"

"And when I think," Flo sighed, "how I would film on a mule!"

A betrayal of romance, deepening hour by hour. They had wanted desert, and by desert they knew what they meant. And by some hiatus of imagination their local arranger had given them mountains.

"We could even have done mountains out there on the Coast if these things had been mountains. Look here, I came to Africa to see big things, big emotions, big courage, big vices, big land!"

Poor people! In the healthy western exuberance of their spirits they had wanted anything, anything but stagnation, anything but drab and slatternly space. And then the humanity!

"Look here, do you imagine I could do a Bedouin horseman now? With a straight face? Even if I could pick up a bunch of 'extras' that could make up to look dead, filthy, contemptible, lazy, and worthless enough? I could not. And did they attack us? They did not. They took the other side of the hills, in a cloud of dust."

It seems, though, that the thing in Braun—the romanticist or poet or what you wish to call it—was not yet ready for final surrender. "Wait," he had said. "This may be bunk. But this Muley Kaf we're going to see, he must be something if he's head sheik of a region as big as Virginia. And this town, Beni Sid. That means 'Sons of the Lion.' Wait till we see Beni Sid."

"I waited," Flo told me, "and I wish you could have seen Arno's face."

I could imagine it. To one who has been a long time in the desert there may be something mildly exciting in that naked, square-housed, mud-colored village squatting

in the midst of a few stunted and unkempt mountain palms, but to one fresh from the sights of the Oriental Section at Universal City it must be a let-down indeed.

They had one moment, though, when the sheik, Mouley Khaf, came riding out (to their amazement) to greet them by name in perfect French and usher them to the sheikly guest-house.

"That man would do. Red robes, silks, white turban, red boots——"

Flo took up the category, "And an aquiline nose, velvet-black inscrutable eyes . . ."

"A little sinister," I put in, for I too knew Mouley Khaf.

Flo pursed her lips in doubt, but Braun turned and looked me in the eyes with the straight look of the Anglo-Saxon.

"Sinister? Bosh! old man. Bosh!"

Then he was smiling again with that humor that will not down.

"He had a good horse between his legs too; a shade on the under-fed, but pretty all the same, with a high red saddle as you see."

"Arno looked especially at the horse, you understand. And he said to Muley: 'I'm that hungry I could eat a *horse!*' "

Their eyes met for an instant, twinkling.

"It's like this," Braun explained. "I have to read a good deal for these plays of mine, and once I came across the story of an Arabian king who thought he was the most generous of men. But once he heard of a poor man who was reputed more generous. This poor man had one beautiful steed and nothing else to his name. So this king sent one of his courtiers to ask the gift of the steed, just to see. The courtier arrived at the poor man's tent at night tired and hungry, but he didn't count on much of a meal.

What was his pleasant surprise when a fine stew was set before him. He ate it, thanked his host, and went to sleep. In the morning before he left he asked the gift of a steed. The poor man wrung his hands and wept. 'Ah me!' he cried, ' 'twas but last night when, seeing you hungry in my tent, I slew my only steed to give you of him to eat.' . . . Good stuff, eh? Darn good stuff! I was going to use that."

"So," Flo resumed, "he looked at Muley's horse and said: 'I'm that hungry I could eat a *horse!*' And *I* said: 'I'm that hungry I could eat a *white horse!*' Muley seemed to catch on. He bowed and put his hand on the horse's neck and said: 'Hers is the pure blood of the mare of the Prophet. I carried her from the foaling in my arms. But, nevertheless, the Arab's sweetest mare is meat none too sweet for the hunger of the guest in his house.' He bowed low again and gave the horse to a black boy to lead off behind the house."

"All that afternoon," Braun chuckled, "Flo was repenting at leisure."

"I was not. Didn't I keep saying: 'I will eat it'?"

"Oh, yes, she said it. . . . But let me tell you we had a wrastle with the household over that meal. First-off, Muley was for sending it in to the guest-house for us, and then when we'd made him see we had rather eat with him, Flo just caught the nigger wench in time that was starting to set a *table,* with knives and *forks* in the court. 'Oh, no,' we told him, 'as long as we're with you we want to eat Arab style.' "

"Was he nice about it?"

"Nice! Good Lord, yes! Silk couldn't be politer. That's the discouraging thing when a man's going after realism in a country like this. You can't get away from it; from the lowest to the highest, your native is never going to be himself before the white man. Oh, yes, I know; technically perhaps the Arab is white. But all the same

he ain't. If he was he wouldn't feel inferior. For instance, when that dinner was brought in. Here he was, lord-high-mighty ruler of the land, and yet do you think he presumed to eat with us? After he'd taken one bite that embarrassment came over him, and try our darnedest, we couldn't shake it. It's fundamental. All he'd do was sit there in a corner, sipping coffee and saying he wasn't hungry."

That their host (after having formally "eaten bread and salt" with them) might have been moved by other considerations (racial and religious) against further dipping the hand in the dish with "dogs of unbelievers" would have surprised them. I wondered if I ought to explain. But I had a sneaking sense that it might sound a little like "showing off." And then too it would have been out of key with the mood. So instead I asked: "Was it good, the mess?"

"Well, if you'd seen Flo's expression when she'd fished out her first hunk of meat, when she actually found it in her mouth . . ."

"Arno, that's a lie. If you remember, I said: 'It's grand!' "

"Ho-ho! Well, you looked silly enough when he told us. . . . You see, I asked him casually if they often ate horse, and he looked a little bewildered and said no. Then he brightened up and said, 'Ah, monsieur, but you must understand. By the grace of God' (he never said Allah once; it was always *'Dieu,'* 'God'—but he was so damned polite) 'By the grace of God,' said he, 'as I was preparing to slay the mare for your eating, just then there came in a herd boy leading a sheep. And the meat of sheep is sweeter. So that I was glad.' He wanted me to pat him on the head, I suppose. I could have shot him."

"It's a queer thing," Flo reflected, "we were both prepared to eat horse, down to the last hideous hoof. And

now mutton we could not eat. Actually! I suppose it was just the revulsion. Arno had brought along some crackers and cheese, fortunately. We finished off on those."

"They were kind of dry." Braun sucked his cheeks. "I'd have given a dollar for a glass of red wine. But either the old boy didn't have any . . ."

"It's against the Law of the Prophet."

"Lord! I know that. So it is of America. But somehow it had never occurred to me it ran right through to the better classes. Anyhow, it was dry. Not only the crackers. I mean the whole situation. 'Flat, stale, and unprofitable!' I had a feeling in my bones right then that we were going to draw a blank, but all the same we were there and it had to be gone through with, according to program.

"So by and by I got up and yawned and said I guessed I'd take a stroll. 'All right,' said Muley. Probably the lady was tuckered and would like to retire to the guest-house, and he'd come along with me. That was Flo's cue. The moon had come up, which helped. She lay back on the cushions and looked at it and stretched kind of languorous-like and allowed there was no moon in the guest-house, and please couldn't she stay where she was for a while? Surest thing in the world. Certainly she could. And now he'd step along with me. . . . *My* cue! No, said I, if he didn't mind I'd like to go alone for a little solitary communing with Nature. The man looked *shocked.*

" 'But, monsieur, that would be dangerous! My own people are honest; but these nomads! You don't know nomads! Dangerous, monsieur!'

"Dangerous! If he'd known what I'd have given just then for a touch of real danger, something to give my spine a taste of high life! I had to laugh. But he was bogg-eyed about it, and I was beginning to be up against it when

I heard Flo saying under her breath: 'For the love of Mike, man, turn your head and walk the other way.' . . . I don't know yet what you did, Flo."

"What I did? Silly man!" In the half-dark of the terrace Flo's eyes shone softly with a demure and mocking light. "No woman would have asked that question, Arno. I simply leaned over and laid a hand quietly on Muley's arm and covered my eyes with my lashes—but not quite, not quite, enough."

"Well, all I know is, it worked."

"Simple creatures! It *always* works. I heard your feet going off, Arno, and I didn't breathe till I heard the gate bang under the entrance arch. Then I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and we were alone. He and I! The mysterious dark sheik and the American lass, in a desert courtyard, under the hot African moo-o-on! *Al-o--n---e!*"

Her laughter trilled and went away in the heavy-scented night.

"And then, Flo? You never told me. What then?"

"Then? Then I waited. And I waited. *And* I waited. When I'd waited centuries I *had* to open my eyes and look at him. There he sat. Staring at his thumbs. There he sat. There I sat, my hand gripping the automatic in my bag ready to sell my honor dearly. There the moon sat. Oh, my dears, it was too perfect!

"I began to think he was prepared to sit like that till the day of doom. He might have been a wooden Indian, except he was getting a funny color around the gills. I told myself I'd die before I spoke first, but after another century I said 'Ahem!' He only got stonier and greener. Then I sighed and looked at the moon and said how bright and far and cold it was, and did it make him lonely too?"

"What did he say to that?"

"He said: 'Where is your husband?' I said: 'Bother my husband! If I don't worry, why should *you?*' I

hitched my cushion a little closer. He got still greener. The moon got still higher.

"By and by he repeated himself, 'Where is your husband?' He was still staring fascinated at those thumbs of his. And do you know what those thumbs were doing? The thumbs of that ruthless, passionate daredevil of the Sahara? Well, they were shivering; shivering, I give you my word, like leaves. And at that the truth came over me in a flash what was wrong with him. He was scared to death of Arno!"

Braun chuckled. "And then, Flo?"

"Oh, then I just let go. If *that* was the matter, there was only one way to put him at his ease. Flinging my maiden modesty to the winds, I started out to vamp that man. Plain ten-twenty-thirty vamp! You're surprised?" she asked me with a smile. "Let me tell you a secret, my dear man. My first littlest bit of a name I made in a scarlet-woman rôle, years ago. That's God's own truth. You're surprised at that? You're just like the public. Ask any big director, and he'll tell you the same. For your ideal film vampire what you want to hunt for is your honest, wholesome girl, the girl that brings her mother to the Coast with her and cuts out the beach parties and goes to church and isn't afraid of work. That's queer; and like many queer things it's true. The simplest, sweetest girlie in the world knows how to use her eyes, simply from the fact that she was born girl. . . . And believe me, that night I used my eyes!

"Well," she went on with a whimsical sigh, "I vamped. *And* I vamped. If it hadn't been purely for getting stuff I'd almost have blushed."

She put her hands over her face of a sudden. Her voice was small.

"Heavens! Now, when I think of it in cold blood, it *does* make me blush. . . . I—I—I put—*I put my head on his s-h-o-u-l-d-e-r!*"

After a moment she took her hands away. Her cheeks were rosy, but there was a glint in her eyes.

"Oh yes, it's funny! It's a scream! Now! But I'll tell you—I never confessed this to you, Arno—there came a time that night when the point of the joke began to wear off. I'll tell you a secret about women. No woman alive enjoys being turned down by a man, even if the reason is only that the man is scared of the woman's husband. In her heart of hearts the woman always feels that somehow the man ought to be too much carried away even for that. . . . Yes, frankly, my 'goat was got.' Arno, I could have slain you. Here I was in my grand scene, and everything wrong-end-to. And all your fault for looking so disgustingly husky and masculine and Western. And I could have slain *him,* too. There I'd brought along my automatic as a kind of last resource, in case he should get funny, seriously funny; and now I felt like shooting him for *not*—for being a sniping half-lump of a man that wouldn't take a chance. . . . First it made me tired. Then I got mad. I saw red. That was how it worked. And when for the tenth time he asked me where my husband was I went up in the air.

"I did! It was a fool thing, I know, but it seemed to me if I didn't do some fool thing that minute I should explode. Do you know what I did? I took hold of his chin and made him look at me, and I just hissed at him:

" 'You want to know where my husband is? Well, I'll tell you. *He is in—your—harem! There!*' . . . I wasn't going to tell you that, Arno."

At least she had made us both open our eyes. It was the first time I had ever seen a frown on Braun's face. He spoke slowly.

"That *was* rotten, Flo. Flo, I'm sorry you did that. I wouldn't have had that happen for a million dollars. After all, you know—black, brown, yellow—no matter

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what kind of a person you're with—after all, you're his *guest*. That's honestly how I feel about it."

"But it wasn't true!" I gasped. "You weren't—actually!"

He shook himself free of his ill humor, and a reminiscent gleam lit his eye. His clean-cut jaw thrust forward a bit.

"Yes," he said quietly. "I was."

"Good Lord, man, tell me about it!"

"If there was anything to tell then we shouldn't be coming back with this sense of failure on our souls." He smiled with a hint of indulgent irony. "It's a simple tale."

"But how did you get back into the house again?"

"Child's play. I never went out. I simply slammed the door and then lay doggo inside for a spell under the archway. When I thought the coast was clear I sneaked back on tiptoe along the gallery that runs around the court, and when I came to the door I had spotted—— Oh, I hadn't been idle that afternoon with my eyes, and especially my ears—when I came to it I went in. That's simple, isn't it?"

It was simple, yes; and yet how many men would have had the cold nerve to do it?

"And after I was in," he went on in his laconic western way, "and around a corner in the dark passage, I scratched a match and had a look. And I saw the dragon. The dragon was that nigger wench who had brought in the dinner. She sat on the floor on a piece of gunny-sack, staring at me with eyes as big and as white as saucers. I pulled out my automatic, made a few passes before her black face so she could have a good look at it, and then I had a talk with her.

" 'Where are his wives?' says I. *'Ses femmes? Où? Ses femmes?'*

"Not a gleam! She wasn't meat; she was icicle, froze

cold to the core. Scared? Yes, indeed. Besides, it came to me, maybe she didn't know French. So I tried the Arabic. 'Harem?' says I. 'Harem?' That worked better, or maybe it was the cool of the gun muzzle on her chin. Anyhow, she managed to move one eye toward the end of the hall. 'All right,' says I. I had a handful of this stage money the French use in my pocket, and I took it out and dumped it in her lap. That's the language they *all* know. The way she caught on would make you laugh. 'Now,' says I, laying my cheek on my hand, 'you go by-by. Sleep. *Dormir.* And if you snore a little it won't hurt.' And then I went on, easy in my mind.

"I came to the door she had looked at. I laid aside the rug hanging. I entered into the sheik's harem. Moonlight falling through a lofty grill flooded the spacious apartment, in the center of which a fountain plashed softly within its marble rims. On the tessellated pavement, on a dozen richly embroidered cushions, reclined the sloe-eyed daughters of delight. One trailed an idle hand in the pool; one braided her raven tresses; one, taking up a lute, made a languorous music that fell softly on the air, heavy-sweet with musk and amber. One, at sight of me in the doorway, half-rising from a divan . . . Oh, man, was it? Did they?"

I met his grin with one of my own, as sheepish.

"I'm afraid not. They told me last year that Mouley Khaf had only one current wife. The war's left them all pretty poor, you know. But perhaps—since then——"

"No. As I started to say; one, half-rising from a divan —well, that *one* was the wives of the sheik, and the divan was a brass bedstead, and yesterday's cabbage was the amber and musk. Yes, sir. Except for that brass bed and a kind of painted tool-chest in the corner and about four German-dyed carpets, there wasn't one God's stick of furniture in that mud room. And as for the Oriental Beauty!"

Braun put his head down in his hands.

"She had on a Mother Hubbard!" he groaned. "With *spots!*"

"This person," he went on presently, "was scared. Bogg-eyed. For a minute I was in a sweat she'd let out a yell—her mouth was wide open. I gave her a sheen of the gun in the moonlight, but now I don't think there was any need. She was simply petrified!

" 'Well,' says I to myself, 'Where do we go from here?' I went and sat down on a corner of the bed and looked at her, my heart going down, down, down. So *this* was what I'd come expensively all this way to see. I wanted to laugh. I wanted to hoot like an owl.

"Her fright was honestly painful. If there's anything I hate and detest it's to scare a kid. Yes, that's right; that's what I mean. A kid. This wife of Mouley Khaf's, this tousle-headed queen of the harem—I give you my word when I came to look at her closer, she couldn't have been a day over thirteen. Can you beat it? Thirteen years old, a wife, and (I'll whisper it) prospectively, a mother.

"Now you can imagine how I felt. There she sat, this poor, pathetic, whipped kid, staring at me like a ghost, with her eyes and her mouth wide open. . . . I was as gentle as I could be.

" 'Look at me,' says I, putting the gun out of sight. 'Do I look like a person that would hurt you?' . . . (Not a ray.)

" 'Lord o' Love, sister,' says I, 'I'd no more think of harming one little hair of your head——'

"Of course, it was all Greek to her. I don't suppose she'd have known even French, or anything but Arabic."

"Perhaps not even Arab," I put in. "It's Berber country, you know."

"So? Oh! Well, whatever it was, there we were at

a deadlock. There she sat hugging her bib-and-tucker to her neck. And (apologies to Flo) there *I* sat. Silence.

"Now, you can laugh. Especially when you think what I came all this way to get: stuff for a very dramatic scene, sumptuous and passionate and all that. And do you know what I got? I got mad. Plain, boiling mad! When I looked at that kid there, that little innocent girl that ought to have been in school or playing with other kids or tucked in at night by a mother's hand—when I looked at that kid there and thought of those others, the laughing, wholesome, care-free kids back there in God's country—Damn it! No, I've got to swear! Damn it! You know what? It seemed to me the only honest thing a man could do would be to go out and walk through this land from one end to the other with a Lewis gun, cleaning up this human garbage they call 'men.' Missionaries? God'l'mighty! the only missionaries they deserve is a bunch of boys from Texas with six-guns. . . . No, I'm not often dead in earnest, but I am now. When I looked at that sallow-faced child that this Muley shut up in a mud cage and called a 'wife,' why it seemed the only thing I could do and keep my self-respect would be to walk out and fill him with honest American lead.

"And then there he was. 'Speak of the Devil' . . . I saw the kid's eyes growing if anything bigger, and I heard feet behind me at the door. I slid my hand in my pocket and I got up to face him. I didn't hurry. I was that mad I was as cool as a cucumber.

"There he stood in the doorway, his face as white as a sheet. I expected ructions. I didn't care. I had him covered from my pocket, even if he didn't know it, and one false move on his part——"

" 'If you got anything to say,' says I, 'say it!'

"The sanctity of the harem! The fatal honor of the Arab! Sudden death! Lord, I've known 'em since I

was a kid. Well, do you know what that Oriental nobleman said to me? He said:

" 'Coffee is being served in the courtyard.'

"Well, you could've knocked me over. I followed him. Actually. I went out and sat down beside Flo. The nigger-wench brought in two cups of coffee, looking kind of puffy around the eyes as if she's had a call-down. We drank the coffee while Muley sat there staring at his thumbs. I looked at Flo and I said: 'How goes it?' 'Elegant! and with you?' says she. 'Immense!' . . . That was the straw that ruined the camel. We simply fell on each other's necks. We simply *yelled!*

"When Flo got her breath back and the tears brushed out of her eyes,

" 'Arno!' she wailed, 'I want to go home!' 'Here, too,' says I. 'A mule, a mule, my kingdom for a mule!'

"I don't know whether it was that the man understood a few words of English or not, but pretty soon he spoke up: 'The mules of monsieur and madame will be saddled at the gate at the hour of dawn.' For a minute it was kind of embarrassing—if he had understood—I didn't want to make it look like we were eating and running. Flo saw it in my eye. She got hold of my wrist. 'Arno!' she hissed, *'this is no time for politeness!'* It was the way she said it. I couldn't help it again; I howled. But it *was* funny. There we were, weeks wasted, all our pet illusions shattered, play gone to pot——"

"Why?"

It was the first thing Flo had said for a long while. A light of preoccupation was in her eyes.

"Why 'gone to pot'?" she repeated in the same slow musing way.

"Why? Simply, Flo, because if I can't do a thing sincerely; if I've got to go about a thing with my tongue in my cheek——"

"Yes, Arno, but why? Think! You came to find

realism, and now that you've found it——" She let her words trail off, her eyes still holding his, her head tilted, birdwise. There was a moment of silence, and then Braun said, deep in his throat: "By George!"

"Yes, that's what I mean. Why not," she insisted, "hold the mirror up to nature as she *is?* A good satire is as good as Art. Honestly, you know, I believe it would go big."

"Look at 'A Yankee at the Court of King Arthur!'" It was Braun's turn now. "It's made a mint. And look at that one—I forget the name—where Mary Pickford showed up the Nabobs of India!"

Again there was silence, a moving and pregnant silence this time, in which one seemed to feel a mental clash, a kaleidoscopic tumbling into symmetry of things sharp-edged and crystalline. There is something not of everyday in being present at the coming to bed of an idea.

"That's the way of it," Braun's musing grew audible. "Take a young fellow—you could play that part, Flo, like what's-her-name in Treasure Island—take some orphan kid that's been kicked around the gutters of some Middle-western town all his life—bullyragged and browbeaten by everybody till he's got the notion he isn't worth a continental—take this kid and bring him over here somehow. Well, and—and let him have read a lot of Arabian Nights or something, so he arrives here all eyes and awe for the splendors of the Orient and the fierceness of the magnificent sheiks. Let him go out into the desert. He's almost afraid to raise his eyes to these lords of creation—almost—not quite, for he's Anglo-Saxon clear through—and when he does, what is his stupefaction to find them all kowtowing. Listen, this is good. Let him get into a harem, bogg-eyed with expectation, and stumble over a dish of potato peelings, and then throw on a two-dollar bedroom at the Commercial House at home that he'd thought so tawdry, and all its modern comforts; and

we must get the outraged Arab husband creeping in, armed to the teeth for revenge . . . and when he sees this American kid there—well, whatever we *don't* do, we've got to get in that 'Coffee is being served in the courtyard!' Oh, say! this will bear going into. . . ."

I could see they wanted to think. They wanted to be alone. I delivered them up with some mumbled urbanity and watched them go, threading their way through the throng in the salon beyond the tall bright windows. I saw men and women of cosmopolitan fame turn to look after them as they passed. But they did not know it. To those two the bigness and glory of that night was within themselves. They had tasted failure (even if it were a laughing failure) and now, amazingly, unexpectedly, they found failure turned into the prospect of a laughing success. . . . And how typical that was!

"You Americans! You can do anything!"

It was almost a year later that I found myself in the Aures and came to Beni Sid, "Sons of the Lion." Si Mouley was absent on government affairs in Ain Touta. I went up from the guest-house at evening and sat in the graveyard, a naked earth pitted with the ghoul-work of jackals. The sun, sinking down into the desert plain beyond the hills, cast an aureate flame over the gorge walls, and there was peace. The bleat of flocks gathering home under the ragged palms where the shadow already flooded the oasis and the town, gave a body to the silence—the silence as ancient as the granite hills themselves.

A woman had followed me up the slope and now sat on a neighboring grave. Her name was Meryam and she was so old that everyone, including herself, had forgotten her years, a gossip of mine from other days. An incorrigible gossip! Her words, toothless, and still further blurred by the greasy kerchief which she held from long habit over her mouth, ran on and on and mingled with

the distant voices of the flocks, and it never mattered much whether I listened or no.

"What of the Americans?" I inquired by and by. "The *roumi?* Remembrest thou? The *roumi* twain that were here?"

The flow of Meryam's speech was halted. After a moment she lifted the kerchief and leaning over clear of the grave spat on the ground. After another moment she said: "It is of little marvel, however, that they should not be learned in the manners of the world, for are they not ignorant of the Word of God (to whom be the prayer)? Canst thou look for the ways of gentlefolk in the *dar* of the Infidel?"

"But I am told, Meryam, that against them Si Mouley raised not his hand."

"How then may a man raise a hand that is bound? Our master had eaten the bread and salt with this twain. And knowest thou not the reading of the blessed Book as it regards the traveler which shall be entered at nightfall into thy tents?"

I fell to musing. The creature's words mumbled on, troubling the immense, dry, empty hush of the wrinkled Sahara hardly at all.

"Our master was affectionate toward the face of this Aisha, for she was to bear him presently, *in-cha-'llah,* a son."

"Aisha? That, Meryam, is Si Mouley's young wife whom he brought from the vale of the Oulad Abdi two springs ago? But thou sayest 'was.' Is he then no longer affectionate in the face of that one?"

"Thou sittest, sidi, on the grave of that one."

I stared down between my knees at the mound of desert earth and a heaviness came on me.

"Ai, sidi, those twain are dead, Aisha and Zina, that black serving-woman from the Soudan. And I, Meryam, was at their dying."

The sun had dipped beneath the desert's edge, ninety million miles away; a shadow came over the earth and sat on my soul.

"Those twain had eaten of the *couscous* which our master had caused to be sent in to them, and now they waited, knowing well the seasoning wherewith it had been savored. And Aisha contained her heart, and she said with a jest: 'Look thou, are we then become men at last? that we may be given to dip first in the evening dish.' But the serving-woman, she who for twenty *duoro* in the Frenchmen's money-paper had been leagued with her in the sin——"

"But there *was* no sin! Meryam, this is devil's work. There was no sin. Of this thing I have a sure knowledge. Ah, Meryam, thou understandest not the American!"

"That mayhap be true, *ya* sidi. We of Musseldom pretend only to know the Law. The Law is the Light, and the Light is the truth of all things. And sayeth not the Law, that Law which was before even the blessed Prophet of God: 'Such woman shall be known as adulterous as have remained alone with any man for the space of the cooking of an egg'? And is it well for a man, a princely man, a sheik of the true believers, to harbor an adultress in his house and bed? Say, *ya* sidi!"

After a little I began to unravel her monotonous words again.

"It was after the fall of the sun; there came a darkness in that room, so that I could see only the eyes of those twain which were set toward the lattice, waiting. And as I watched, grief came into my entrails with a pain, as though I, too, had dipped in that dish, for sorrow of them, and perforce I could not stay, but must go out of the house where I might not see. And when I returned, Si Mouley, drinking with his coffee-companions in the court, wept behind his hand, and in the chamber of the women those twain were dead. . . ."

I got up from sitting on that grave and withdrew a step and looked down at it in the gathering shadows. Already, between the two blank slabs of granite, the inquisitive paw of a jackal had been at work. A sepulcher of no beauty and of no hope.

It needed a something—a something it had not got.

"I shall die, and in the following Episode (coming Saturday, 3:30, 7:30 and 9:00 P. M.) I shall rise again."

"Ah, you Americans!"

Aisha and Zina and Meryam and Mouley Khaf and Mohammed, Prophet of the One God, would do better for a little of that philosophy of yours, would they not?

And the mocking devil of it is, they *would*.

MR. REGINALD PEACOCK'S DAY[1]

Katherine Mansfield

If there was one thing that he hated more than another it was the way she had of waking him in the morning. She did it on purpose, of course. It was her way of establishing her grievance for the day, and he was not going to let her know how successful it was. But really, really, to wake a sensitive person like that was positively dangerous! It took him hours to get over it—simply hours. She came into the room buttoned up in an overall, with a handkerchief over her head—thereby proving that she had been up herself and slaving since dawn—and called in a low, warning voice: "Reginald!"

"Eh! What! What's that? What's the matter?"

"It's time to get up; it's half-past eight." And out she went, shutting the door quietly after her, to gloat over her triumph, he supposed.

He rolled over in the big bed, his heart still beating in quick, dull throbs, and with every throb he felt his energy escaping him, his—his inspiration for the day stifling under those thudding blows. It seemed that she took a malicious delight in making life more difficult for him than —Heaven knows—it was, by denying him his rights as an artist, by trying to drag him down to her level. What was the matter with her? What the hell did she want? Hadn't he three times as many pupils now as when they were first married, earned three times as much, paid for

[1]Reprinted from *Bliss*, by Katherine Mansfield, by and with permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publishers.

every stick and stone that they possessed, and now had begun to shell out for Adrian's kindergarten? . . . And had he ever reproached her for not having a penny to her name? Never a word—never a sign! The truth was that once you married a woman she became insatiable, and the truth was that nothing was more fatal for an artist than marriage, at any rate until he was well over forty. . . . Why had he married her? He asked himself this question on an average about three times a day, but he never could answer it satisfactorily. She had caught him at a weak moment, when the first plunge into reality had bewildered and overwhelmed him for a time. Looking back, he saw a pathetic, youthful creature, half child, half wild untamed bird, totally incompetent to cope with bills and creditors and all the sordid details of existence. Well—she had done her best to clip his wings, if that was any satisfaction for her, and she could congratulate herself on the success of this early morning trick. One ought to wake exquisitely, reluctantly, he thought, slipping down in the warm bed. He began to imagine a series of enchanting scenes which ended with his latest, most charming pupil putting her bare, scented arms round his neck, and covering him with her long, perfumed hair. "Awake, my love!" . . .

As was his daily habit, while the bath water ran, Reginald Peacock tried his voice.

> When her mother tends her before the laughing mirror,
> Looping up her laces, tying up her hair,

he sang, softly at first, listening to the quality, nursing his voice until he came to the third line:

> Often she thinks, were this wild thing wedded . . .

and upon the word "wedded" he burst into such a shout of triumph that the tooth-glass on the bathroom shelf

trembled and even the bath tap seemed to gush stormy applause. . . .

Well, there was nothing wrong with his voice, he thought, leaping into the bath and soaping his soft, pink body all over with a loofah shaped like a fish. He could fill Covent Garden with it! *"Wedded!"* he shouted again, seizing the towel with a magnificent operatic gesture, and went on singing while he rubbed as though he had been Lohengrin tipped out by an unwary Swan and drying himself in the greatest haste before that tiresome Elsa came along—along. . . .

Back in his bedroom, he pulled the blind up with a jerk, and standing upon the pale square of sunlight that lay upon the carpet like a sheet of cream blotting-paper, he began to do his exercises—deep breathing, bending forward and back, squatting like a frog and shooting out his legs—for if there was one thing he had a horror of it was of getting fat, and men in his profession had a dreadful tendency that way. However, there was no sign of it at present. He was, he decided, just right, just in good proportion. In fact, he could not help a thrill of satisfaction when he saw himself in the glass, dressed in a morning coat, dark gray trousers, gray socks and a black tie with a silver thread in it. Not that he was vain—he couldn't stand vain men—no; the sight of himself gave him a thrill of purely artistic satisfaction. *"Voilà tout!"* said he, passing his hand over his sleek hair.

That little, easy French phrase blown so lightly from his lips, like a whiff of smoke, reminded him that someone had asked him again, the evening before, if he was English. People seemed to find it impossible to believe that he hadn't some Southern blood. True, there was an emotional quality in his singing that had nothing of the John Bull in it. . . . The door-handle rattled and turned round and round. Adrian's head popped through.

"Please, Father, Mother says breakfast is quite ready, please."

"Very well," said Reginald. Then, just as Adrian disappeared: "Adrian!"

"Yes, Father."

"You haven't said 'good-morning.'"

A few months ago Reginald had spent a week-end in a very aristocratic family, where the father received his little sons in the morning and shook hands with them. Reginald thought the practice charming, and introduced it immediately, but Adrian felt dreadfully silly at having to shake hands with his own father every morning. And why did his father always sort of sing to him instead of talk?

In excellent temper, Reginald walked into the dining-room and sat down before a pile of letters, a copy of the *Times,* and a little covered dish. He glanced at the letters and then at his breakfast. There were two thin slices of bacon and one egg.

"Don't you want any bacon?" he asked.

"No, I prefer a cold baked apple. I don't feel the need of bacon every morning."

Now, did she mean that there was no need for him to have bacon every morning, either, and that she grudged having to cook it for him?

"If you don't want to cook the breakfast," said he, "why don't you keep a servant? You know we can afford one, and you know how I loathe to see my wife doing the work. Simply because all the women we have had in the past have been failures, and utterly upset my régime, and made it almost impossible for me to have any pupils here, you've given up trying to find a decent woman. It's not impossible to train a servant—is it? I mean, it doesn't require genius?"

"But I prefer to do the work myself; it makes life so

much more peaceful. . . . Run along, Adrian darling, and get ready for school."

"Oh, no, that's not it!" Reginald pretended to smile. "You do the work yourself, because, for some extraordinary reason, you love to humiliate me. Objectively, you may not know that, but, subjectively, it's the case." This last remark so delighted him that he cut open an envelope as gracefully as if he had been on the stage. . . .

DEAR MR. PEACOCK:

I feel I cannot go to sleep until I have thanked you again for the wonderful joy your singing gave me this evening. Quite unforgettable. You make me wonder, as I have not wondered since I was a girl, if this is *all*. I mean, if this ordinary world is *all*. If there is not, perhaps, for those of us who understand, divine beauty and richness awaiting us if we only have the *courage* to see it. And to make it ours. . . . The house is so quiet. I wish you were here now that I might thank you in person. You are doing a great thing. You are teaching the world to escape from life!

Yours, most sincerely,

ÆNONE FELL.

P. S. I am in every afternoon this week. . . .

The letter was scrawled in violet ink on thick, handmade paper. Vanity, that bright bird, lifted its wings again, lifted them until he felt his breast would break.

"Oh, well, don't let us quarrel," said he, and actually flung out a hand to his wife.

But she was not great enough to respond.

"I must hurry and take Adrian to school," said she. "Your room is quite ready for you."

Very well—very well—let there be open war between them! But he was hanged if he'd be the first to make it up again!

He walked up and down his room, and was not calm again until he heard the outer door close upon Adrian and his wife. Of course, if this went on, he would have to make some other arrangement. That was obvious. Tied and bound like this, how could he help the world to

escape from life? He opened the piano and looked up his pupils for the morning. Miss Betty Brittle, the Countess Wilkowska and Miss Marian Morrow. They were charming, all three.

Punctually at half-past ten the door-bell rang. He went to the door. Miss Betty Brittle was there, dressed in white, with her music in a blue silk case.

"I'm afraid I'm early," she said, blushing and shy, and she opened her big blue eyes very wide. "Am I?"

"Not at all, dear lady. I am only too charmed," said Reginald. "Won't you come in?"

"It's such a heavenly morning," said Miss Brittle. "I walked across the Park. The flowers were too marvelous."

"Well, think about them while you sing your exercises," said Reginald, sitting down at the piano. "It will give your voice color and warmth."

Oh, what an enchanting idea! What a *genius* Mr. Peacock was. She parted her pretty lips, and began to sing like a pansy.

"Very good, very good, indeed," said Reginald, playing chords that would waft a hardened criminal to heaven. "Make the notes round. Don't be afraid. Linger over them, breathe them like a perfume."

How pretty she looked, standing there in her white frock, her little blonde head tilted, showing her milky throat.

"Do you ever practise before a glass?" asked Reginald. "You ought to, you know it makes the lips more flexible. Come over here."

They went over to the mirror and stood side by side.

"Now sing—moo-e-koo-e-oo-e-a!"

But she broke down, and blushed more brightly than ever.

"Oh," she cried, "I can't. It makes me feel so silly. It makes me want to laugh. I do look so absurd!"

"No, you don't. Don't be afraid," said Reginald, but laughed, too, very kindly. "Now, try again!"

The lesson simply flew, and Betty Brittle quite got over her shyness.

"When can I come again?" she asked, tying the music up again in the blue silk case. "I want to take as many lessons as I can just now. Oh, Mr. Peacock, I do enjoy them so much. May I come the day after to-morrow?"

"Dear lady, I shall be only too charmed," said Reginald, bowing her out.

Glorious girl! And when they had stood in front of the mirror, her white sleeve had just touched his black one. He could feel—yes, he could actually feel a warm glowing spot, and he stroked it. She loved her lessons. His wife came in.

"Reginald, can you let me have some money? I must pay the dairy. And will you be in for dinner to-night?"

"Yes, you know I'm singing at Lord Timbuck's at half-past nine. Can you make me some clear soup, with an egg in it?"

"Yes. And the money, Reginald. It's eight and sixpence."

"Surely that's very heavy—isn't it?"

"No, it's just what it ought to be. And Adrian must have milk."

There she was—off again. Now she was standing up for Adrian against him.

"I have not the slightest desire to deny my child a proper amount of milk," said he. "Here is ten shillings."

The door-bell rang. He went to the door.

"Oh," said the Countess Wilkowska, "the stairs. I have not a breath." And she put her hand over her heart as she followed him into the music-room. She was all in black, with a little black hat with a floating veil—violets in her bosom.

"Do not make me sing exercises to-day," she cried,

throwing out her hands in her delightful foreign way. "No, to-day I want only to sing songs. . . . And may I take off my violets? They fade so soon."

"They fade so soon—they fade so soon," played Reginald on the piano.

"May I put them here?" asked the Countess, dropping them in a little vase that stood in front of one of Reginald's photographs.

"Dear lady, I should be only too charmed!"

She began to sing, and all was well until she came to the phrase: "You love me. Yes, I *know* you love me!" Down dropped his hands from the keyboard, he wheeled around, facing her.

"No, no; that's not good enough. You can do better than that," cried Reginald ardently. "You must sing as if you were in love. Listen; let me try to show you." And he sang.

"Oh, yes, yes. I see what you mean," stammered the little Countess. "May I try it again?"

"Certainly. Do not be afraid. Let yourself go. Confess yourself. Make proud surrender!" he called above the music. And she sang.

"Yes; better that time. But I still feel you are capable of more. Try it with me. There must be a kind of exultant defiance as well—don't you feel?" And they sang together. Ah! now she was sure she understood. "May I try once again?"

You love me. Yes, I *know* you love me."

The lesson was over before that phrase was quite perfect. The little foreign hands trembled as they put the music together.

"And you are forgetting your violets," said Reginald softly.

"Yes, I think I will forget them," said the Countess,

biting her underlip. What fascinating ways these foreign women have!

"And you will come to my house on Sunday and make music?" she asked.

"Dear lady, I shall be only too charmed!" said Reginald.

Weep ye no more, sad fountains
Why need ye flow so fast?

sang Miss Marian Morrow, but her eyes filled with tears and her chin trembled.

"Don't sing just now," said Reginald. "Let me play it for you." He played so softly.

"Is there anything the matter?" asked Reginald. "You're not quite happy this morning."

No, she wasn't; she was awfully miserable.

"You don't care to tell me what it is?"

It really was nothing in particular. She had those moods sometimes when life seemed almost unbearable.

"Ah, I know," he said; "if I could only help!"

"But you do; you do! Oh, if it were not for my lessons I don't feel I could go on."

"Sit down in the arm-chair and smell the violets and let me sing to you. It will do you just as much good as a lesson."

Why weren't all men like Mr. Peacock?

"I wrote a poem after the concert last night—just about what I felt. Of course, it wasn't *personal.* May I send it to you?"

"Dear lady, I should be only too charmed!"

By the end of the afternoon he was quite tired and lay down on a sofa to rest his voice before dressing. The door of his room was open. He could hear Adrian and his wife talking in the dining-room.

"Do you know what the teapot reminds me of, Mummy? It reminds me of a little sitting-down kitten."

"Does it, Mr. Absurdity?"

Reginald dozed. The telephone bell woke him.

"Ænone Fell is speaking. Mr. Peacock, I have just heard that you were singing at Lord Timbuck's to-night. Will you dine with me, and we can go on together afterwards?" And the words of his reply dropped like flowers down the telephone.

"Dear lady, I should be only too charmed."

What a triumphant evening! The little dinner *tête-à-tête* with Ænone Fell, the drive to Lord Timbuck's in her white motor-car, when she thanked him again for the unforgettable joy. Triumph upon triumph! And Lord Timbuck's champagne simply flowed.

"Have some more champagne, Peacock," said Lord Timbuck. Peacock, you notice—not Mr. Peacock—but Peacock, as if he were one of them. And wasn't he? He was an artist. He could sway them all. And wasn't he teaching them all to escape from life? How he sang! And as he sang, as in a dream he saw their feathers and their flowers and their fans, offered to him, laid before him, like a huge bouquet.

"Have another glass of wine, Peacock."

"I could have any one I liked by lifting a finger," thought Peacock, positively staggering home.

But as he let himself into the dark flat his marvelous sense of elation began to ebb away. He turned up the light in the bedroom. His wife lay asleep, squeezed over to her side of the bed. He remembered suddenly how she had said when he had told her he was going out to dinner: "You might have let me know before!" And how he had answered: "Can't you possibly speak to me without offending against even good manners?" It was incredible, he thought, that she cared so little for him—incredible that she wasn't interested in the slightest in his triumphs and his artistic career. When so many women in her place would have given their eyes. . . . Yes, he

knew it. . . . Why not acknowledge it? . . . And there she lay, an enemy, even in her sleep. . . . Must it ever be thus? he thought, the champagne still working. Ah, if we only were friends, how much I could tell her now! About this evening; even about Timbuck's manner to me, and all that they said to me and so on and so on. If only I felt that she was here to come back to—that I could confide in her—and so on and so on.

In his emotion he pulled off his evening boot and simply hurled it in the corner. The noise woke his wife with a terrible start. She sat up, pushing back her hair. And he suddenly decided to have one more try to treat her as a friend, to tell her everything, to win her. Down he sat on the side of the bed, and seized one of her hands. But of all those splendid things he had to say, not one could he utter. For some fiendish reason, the only words he could get out were: "Dear lady, I should be so charmed—so charmed!"

THE SECRET SHARER[1]

Joseph Conrad

On my right hand there were lines of fishing-stakes resembling a mysterious system of half-submerged bamboo fences, incomprehensible in its division of the domain of tropical fishes, and crazy of aspect as if abandoned forever by some nomad tribe of fishermen now gone to the other end of the ocean; for there was no sign of human habitation as far as the eye could reach. To the left a group of barren islets, suggesting ruins of stone walls, towers, and blockhouses, had its foundations set in a blue sea that itself looked solid, so still and stable did it lie below my feet; even the track of light from the westering sun shone smoothly, without that animated glitter which tells of an imperceptible ripple. And when I turned my head to take a parting glance at the tug which had just left us anchored outside the bar, I saw the straight line of the flat shore joined to the stable sea, edge to edge, with a perfect and unmarked closeness, in one leveled floor half brown, half blue under the enormous dome of the sky. Corresponding in their insignificance to the islets of the sea, two small clumps of trees, one on each side of the only fault in the impeccable joint, marked the mouth of the river Meinam we had just left on the first preparatory stage of our homeward journey; and, far back on the inland level, a larger and loftier mass, the grove surrounding the great Paknam pagoda, was the only thing on which the eye could rest from the vain task of exploring the monotonous

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sweep of the horizon. Here and there gleams as of a few scattered pieces of silver marked the windings of the great river; and on the nearest of them, just within the bar, the tug steaming right into the land became lost to my sight, hull and funnel and masts, as though the impassive earth had swallowed her up without an effort, without a tremor. My eye followed the light cloud of her smoke, now here, now there, above the plain, according to the devious curves of the stream, but always fainter and farther away, till I lost it at last behind the mitre-shaped hill of the great pagoda. And then I was left alone with my ship, anchored at the head of the Gulf of Siam.

She floated at the starting-point of a long journey, very still in an immense stillness, the shadows of her spars flung far to the eastward by the setting sun. At that moment I was alone on her decks. There was not a sound in her—and around us nothing moved, nothing lived, not a canoe on the water, not a bird in the air, not a cloud in the sky. In this breathless pause at the threshold of a long passage we seemed to be measuring our fitness for a long and arduous enterprise, the appointed task of both our existences to be carried out, far from all human eyes, with only sky and sea for spectators and judges.

There must have been some glare in the air to interfere with one's sight, because it was only just before the sun left us that my roaming eyes made out beyond the highest ridge of the principal islet of the group something which did away with the solemnity of perfect solitude. The tide of darkness flowed swiftly; and with tropical suddenness a swarm of stars came out above the shadowy earth, while I lingered yet, my hand resting lightly on my ship's rail as if on the shoulder of a trusted friend. But, with all that multitude of celestial bodies staring down at one, the comfort of quiet communion with her was gone for good. And there were also disturbing sounds by this time—voices, footsteps forward; the steward flitted along the

main-deck, a busily ministering spirit; a hand-bell tinkled urgently under the poop-deck. . . .

I found my two officers waiting for me near the supper table in the lighted cuddy. We sat down at once, and as I helped the chief mate, I said:

"Are you aware that there is a ship anchored inside the islands? I saw her mastheads above the ridge as the sun went down."

He raised sharply his simple face, overcharged by a terrible growth of whisker, and emitted his usual ejaculations: "Bless my soul, sir! You don't say so!"

My second mate was a round-cheeked, silent young man, grave beyond his years, I thought; but as our eyes happened to meet I detected a slight quiver on his lips. I looked down at once. It was not my part to encourage sneering on board my ship. It must be said too that I knew very little of my officers. In consequence of certain events of no particular significance, except to myself, I had been appointed to the command only a fortnight before. Neither did I know much of the hands forward. All these people had been together for eighteen months or so, and my position was that of the only stranger on board. I mention this because it has some bearing on what is to follow. But what I felt most was my being a stranger to the ship; and if all the truth must be told, I was somewhat of a stranger to myself. The youngest man on board (barring the second mate), and untried as yet by a position of the fullest responsibility, I was willing to take the adequacy of the others for granted. They had simply to be equal to their tasks; but I wondered how far I should turn out faithful to that ideal conception of one's own personality every man sets up for himself secretly.

Meanwhile the chief mate, with an almost visible effect of collaboration on the part of his round eyes and frightful whiskers, was trying to evolve a theory of the anchored

ship. His dominant trait was to take all things into earnest consideration. He was of a painstaking turn of mind. As he used to say, he "liked to account to himself" for practically everything that came his way, down to a miserable scorpion he had found in his cabin the week before. The why and wherefore of that scorpion—how it got on board and came to select his room rather than the pantry (which was a dark place and more what a scorpion would be partial to), and how on earth it managed to drown itself in the inkwell of his writing desk—had exercised him infinitely. The ship within the islands was much more easily accounted for; and just as we were about to rise from table, he made his pronouncement. She was, he doubted not, a ship from home lately arrived. Probably she drew too much water to cross the bar except at the top of spring tides. Therefore she went into that natural harbor to wait for a few days in preference to remaining in an open roadstead.

"That's so," confirmed the second mate, suddenly, in his slightly hoarse voice. "She draws over twenty feet. She's the Liverpool ship *Sephora* with a cargo of coal. Hundred and twenty-three days from Cardiff."

We looked at him in surprise.

"The tugboat skipper told me when he came on board for your letters, sir," explained the young man. "He expects to take her up the river the day after to-morrow."

After thus overwhelming us with the extent of his information, he slipped out of the cabin. The mate observed regretfully that he "could not account for that young fellow's whims." What prevented him telling us all about it at once, he wanted to know.

I detained him as he was making a move. For the last two days the crew had had plenty of hard work, and the night before they had very little sleep. I felt painfully that I—a stranger—was doing something unusual when I directed him to let all hands turn in without setting an

anchor-watch. I proposed to keep on deck till one o'clock or thereabouts. I would get the second mate to relieve me at that hour.

"He will turn out the cook and the steward at four," I concluded, "and then give you a call. Of course at the slightest sign of any sort of wind we'll have the hands up and make a start at once."

He concealed his astonishment. "Very well, sir." Outside the cuddy he put his head in the second mate's door to inform him of my unheard-of caprice to take a five hours' anchor-watch on myself. I heard the other raise his voice incredulously— "What? The captain himself?" Then a few more murmurs, a door closed, then another. A few moments later I went on deck.

My strangeness, which had made me sleepless, had prompted that unconventional arrangement, as if I had expected in those solitary hours of the night to get on terms with the ship of which I knew nothing, manned by men of whom I knew very little more. Fast alongside a wharf, littered like any ship in port with a tangle of unrelated things, invaded by unrelated shore people, I had hardly seen her yet properly. Now, as she lay cleared for sea, the stretch of her main-deck seemed to me very fine under the stars. Very fine, very roomy for her size, and very inviting. I descended the poop and paced the waist, my mind picturing to myself the coming passage through the Malay Archipelago, down the Indian Ocean, and up the Atlantic. All its phases were familiar enough to me, every characteristic, all the alternatives which were likely to face me on the high seas—everything! . . . Except the novel responsibility of command. But I took heart from the reasonable thought that the ship was like other ships, the men like other men, and that the sea was not likely to keep any special surprises expressly for my discomfiture.

Arrived at that comforting conclusion, I bethought my-

self of a cigar and went below to get it. All was still down there. Everybody at the after end of the ship was sleeping profoundly. I came out again on the quarter-deck, agreeably at ease in my sleeping-suit on that warm breathless night, barefooted, a glowing cigar in my teeth, and, going forward, I was met by the profound silence of the fore end of the ship. Only as I passed the door of the forecastle I heard a deep, quiet, trustful sigh of some sleeper inside. And suddenly I rejoiced in the great security of the sea as compared with the unrest of the land, in my choice of that untempted life presenting no disquieting problems, invested with an elementary moral beauty by the absolute straightforwardness of its appeal and by the singleness of its purpose.

The riding-light in the fore-rigging burned with a clear, untroubled, as if symbolic, flame, confident and bright in the mysterious shades of the night. Passing on my way aft along the other side of the ship, I observed that the rope side-ladder, put over, no doubt, for the master of the tug when he came to fetch away our letters, had not been hauled in as it should have been. I became annoyed at this, for exactitude in small matters is the very soul of discipline. Then I reflected that I had myself peremptorily dismissed my officers from duty, and by my own act had prevented the anchor-watch from being formally set and things properly attended to. I asked myself whether it was wise ever to interfere with the established routine of duties even from the kindest of motives. My action might have made me appear eccentric. Goodness only knew how that absurdly whiskered mate would "account" for my conduct, and what the whole ship thought of the informality of their new captain. I was vexed with myself.

Not from compunction certainly, but, as it were mechanically, I proceeded to get the ladder in myself. Now a side-ladder of that sort is a light affair and comes in easily, yet my vigorous tug, which should have brought it flying

aboard, merely recoiled upon my own body in a totally unexpected jerk. What the devil! . . . I was so astounded by the immovableness of that ladder that I remained stock-still, trying to account for it to myself like that imbecile mate of mine. In the end, of course, I put my head over the rail.

The side of the ship made an opaque belt of shadow on the darkling glassy shimmer of the sea. But I saw at once something elongated and pale floating very close to the ladder. Before I could form a guess a faint flash of phosphorescent light, which seemed to issue suddenly from the naked body of a man, flickered in the sleeping water with the elusive, silent play of summer lightning in a night sky. With a gasp I saw revealed to my stare a pair of feet, the long legs, a broad livid back immersed right up to the neck in a greenish cadaverous glow. One hand, awash, clutched the bottom rung of the ladder. He was complete but for the head. A headless corpse! The cigar dropped out of my gaping mouth with a tiny plop and a short hiss quite audible in the absolute stillness of all things under heaven. At that I suppose he raised up his face, a dimly pale oval in the shadow of the ship's side. But even then I could only barely make out down there the shape of his black-haired head. However, it was enough for the horrid frost-bound sensation which had gripped me about the chest to pass off. The moment of vain exclamations was past, too. I only climbed on the spare spar and leaned over the rail as far as I could, to bring my eyes nearer to that mystery floating alongside.

As he hung by the ladder, like a resting swimmer, the sea-lightning played about his limbs at every stir; and he appeared in it ghastly, silvery, fish-like. He remained as mute as a fish, too. He made no motion to get out of the water, either. It was inconceivable that he should not attempt to come on board, and strangely troubling to sus-

pect that perhaps he did not want to. And my first words were prompted by just that troubled incertitude.

"What's the matter?" I asked in my ordinary voice, speaking down to the face upturned exactly under mine.

"Cramp," it answered, no louder. Then slightly anxious, "I say, no need to call anyone."

"I was not going to," I said.

"Are you alone on deck?"

"Yes."

I had somehow the impression that he was on the point of letting go the ladder to swim away beyond my ken—mysterious as he came. But, for the moment, this being appearing as if he had risen from the bottom of the sea (it was certainly the nearest land to the ship) wanted only to know the time. I told him. And he, down there, tentatively:

"I suppose your captain's turned in?"

"I am sure he isn't," I said.

He seemed to struggle with himself, for I heard something like the low, bitter murmur of doubt. "What's the good?" His next words came out with a hesitating effort.

"Look here, my man. Could you call him out quietly?"

I thought the time had come to declare myself.

"I am the captain."

I heard a "By Jove!" whispered at the level of the water. The phosphorescence flashed in the swirl of the water all about his limbs, his other hand seized the ladder.

"My name's Leggatt."

The voice was calm and resolute. A good voice. The self-possession of that man had somehow induced a corresponding state in myself. It was very quietly that I remarked:

"You must be a good swimmer."

"Yes. I've been in the water practically since nine o'clock. The question for me now is whether I am to let

go this ladder and go on swimming till I sink from exhaustion, or—to come on board here."

I felt this was no mere formula of desperate speech, but a real alternative in the view of a strong soul. I should have gathered from this that he was young; indeed, it is only the young who are ever confronted by such clear issues. But at the time it was pure intuition on my part. A mysterious communication was already established between us two—in the face of that silent, darkened, tropical sea. I was young, too; young enough to make no comment. The man in the water began suddenly to climb up the ladder, and I hastened away from the rail to fetch some clothes.

Before entering the cabin I stood still, listening in the lobby at the foot of the stairs. A faint snore came through the closed door of the chief mate's room. The second mate's door was on the hook, but the darkness in there was absolutely soundless. He, too, was young and could sleep like a stone. Remained the steward, but he was not likely to wake up before he was called. I got a sleeping-suit out of my room and, coming back on deck, saw the naked man from the sea sitting on the main-hatch, glimmering white in the darkness, his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. In a moment he had concealed his damp body in a sleeping-suit of the same gray-stripe pattern as the one I was wearing and followed me like my double on the poop. Together we moved right aft, barefooted, silent.

"What is it?" I asked in a deadened voice, taking the lighted lamp out of the binnacle, and raising it to his face.

"An ugly business."

He had rather regular features; a good mouth; light eyes under somewhat heavy, dark eyebrows; a smooth, square forehead; no growth on his cheeks; a small, brown moustache, and a well-shaped, round chin. His expression was concentrated, meditative, under the inspecting light of

the lamp I held up to his face; such as a man thinking hard in solitude might wear. My sleeping-suit was just right for his size. A well-knit young fellow of twenty-five at most. He caught his lower lip with the edge of white, even teeth.

"Yes," I said, replacing the lamp in the binnacle. The warm, heavy tropical night closed upon his head again.

"There's a ship over there," he murmured.

"Yes, I know. The *Sephora*. Did you know of us?"

"Hadn't the slightest idea. I am the mate of her——" He paused and corrected himself. "I should say I was."

"Aha! Something wrong?"

"Yes. Very wrong indeed. I've killed a man."

"What do you mean? Just now?"

"No, on the passage. Weeks ago. Thirty-nine south. When I say a man——"

"Fit of temper," I suggested confidently.

The shadowy, dark head, like mine, seemed to nod imperceptibly above the ghostly gray of my sleeping-suit. It was, in the night, as though I had been faced by my own reflection in the depths of a sombre and immense mirror.

"A pretty thing to have to own up to for a Conway boy," murmured my double distinctly.

"You're a Conway boy?"

"I am," he said, as if startled. Then, slowly . . . "Perhaps you too——"

It was so; but being a couple of years older I had left before he joined. After a quick interchange of dates a silence fell; and I thought suddenly of my absurd mate with his terrific whiskers and the "Bless my soul—you don't say so" type of intellect. My double gave me an inkling of his thoughts by saying:

"My father's a parson in Norfolk. Do you see me before a judge and jury on that charge? For myself I can't see the necessity. There are fellows that an angel from heaven—— And I am not that. He was one of

those creatures that are just simmering all the time with a silly sort of wickedness. Miserable devils that have no business to live at all. He wouldn't do his duty and wouldn't let anybody else do theirs. But what's the good of talking! You know well enough the sort of ill-conditioned snarling cur——"

He appealed to me as if our experiences had been as identical as our clothes. And I knew well enough the pestiferous danger of such a character where there are no means of legal repression. And I knew well enough also that my double there was no homicidal ruffian. I did not think of asking him for details, and he told me the story roughly in brusque, disconnected sentences. I needed no more. I saw it all going on as though I were myself inside that other sleeping-suit.

"It happened while we were setting a reefed foresail at dusk. Reefed foresail! You understand the sort of weather. The only sail we had left to keep the ship running; so you may guess what it had been like for days. Anxious sort of job, that. He gave me some of his cursed insolence at the sheet. I tell you I was overdone with this terrific weather that seemed to have no end to it. Terrific, I tell you—and a deep ship. I believe the fellow himself was half crazed with funk. It was no time for gentlemanly reproof, so I turned around and felled him like an ox. He up and at me. We closed just as an awful sea made for the ship. All hands saw it coming and took to the rigging, but I had him by the throat and went on shaking him like a rat, the men above us yelling, 'Look out! Look out!' Then a crash as if the sky had fallen on my head. They say that for over ten minutes hardly anything was to be seen of the ship—just the three masts and a bit of the forecastle head and of the poop all awash driving along in a smother of foam. It was a miracle that they found us, jammed together behind the forebits. It's clear that I meant business because I was hold-

ing him by the throat still when they picked us up. He was black in the face. It was too much for them. It seems they rushed us aft together, gripped as we were, screaming 'Murder!' like a lot of lunatics, and broke into the cuddy. And the ship running for her life, touch and go, all the time, in a sea fit to turn your hair gray only a-looking at it. I understand that the skipper, too, started raving like the rest of them. The man had been deprived of sleep for more than a week, and to have this sprung on him at the height of a furious gale nearly drove him out of his mind. I wonder they didn't fling me overboard after getting the carcass of their precious shipmate out of my fingers. They had rather a job to separate us, I've been told. A sufficiently fierce story to make an old judge and a respectable jury sit up a bit. The first thing I heard when I came to myself was the maddening howling of that endless gale, and on that the voice of the old man. He was hanging on to my bunk, staring into my face out of his sou'wester.

" 'Mr. Leggatt, you have killed a man. You can no longer act as mate of this ship.' "

His care to subdue his voice made it sound monotonous. He rested a hand on the end of the skylight to steady himself with, and all that time did not stir a limb, so far as I could see. "Nice little tale for a quiet tea-party," he concluded in the same tone.

One of my hands, too, rested on the end of the skylight; neither did I stir a limb, so far as I knew. We stood less than a foot from each other. It occurred to me that if old "Bless my soul—you don't say so" were to put his head up the companion and catch sight of us, he would think he was seeing double, or imagine himself come upon a scene of weird witchcraft; the strange captain having a quiet confabulation by the wheel with his own gray ghost. I became very much concerned to prevent anything of the sort. I heard the other's soothing undertone.

"My father's a parson in Norfolk," it said. Evidently he had forgotten he had told me this important fact before. Truly a nice little tale.

"You had better slip down into my stateroom now," I said, moving off stealthily. My double followed my movements; our bare feet made no sound; I let him in, closed the door with care, and, after giving a call to the second mate, returned on deck for my relief.

"Not much sign of any wind yet," I remarked when he approached. "No, sir. Not much," he assented, sleepily, in his hoarse voice, with just enough deference, no more, and barely suppressing a yawn.

"Well, that's all you have to look out for. You have got your orders."

"Yes, sir."

I paced a turn or two on the poop and saw him take up his position face forward with his elbow in the ratlines of the mizzen-rigging before I went below. The mate's faint snoring was still going on peacefully. The cuddy lamp was burning over the table on which stood a vase with flowers, a polite attention from the ship's provision merchant—the last flowers we should see for the next three months at the very least. Two bunches of bananas hung from the beam symmetrically, one on each side of the rudder-casing. Everything was as before in the ship—except that two of her captain's sleeping-suits were simultaneously in use, one motionless in the cuddy, the other keeping very still in the captain's stateroom.

It must be explained here that my cabin had the form of a capital letter L, the door being within the angle and opening into the short part of the letter. A couch was to the left, the bed-place to the right; my writing-desk and the chronometer's table faced the door; but anyone opening it, unless he stepped right inside, had no view of what I call the long (or vertical) part of the letter. It contained some lockers surmounted by a bookcase; and a

few clothes, a thick jacket or two, caps, oilskin coat, and such like, hung on hooks. There was at the bottom of that part a door opening into my bathroom, which could be entered also directly from the saloon. But that way was never used.

The mysterious arrival had discovered the advantage of this particular shape. Entering my room, lighted strongly by a big bulkhead lamp swung on gimbals above my writing-desk, I did not see him anywhere till he stepped out quietly from behind the coats hung in the recessed part.

"I heard somebody moving about, and went in there at once," he whispered.

I, too, spoke under my breath.

"Nobody is likely to come in here without knocking and getting permission."

He nodded. His face was thin and the sunburn faded, as though he had been ill. And no wonder. He had been, I heard presently, kept under arrest in his cabin for nearly seven weeks. But there was nothing sickly in his eyes or in his expression. He was not a bit like me, really; yet, as we stood leaning over my bed-place, whispering side by side, with our dark heads together and our backs to the door, anybody bold enough to open it stealthily would have been treated to the uncanny sight of a double captain busy talking in whispers with his other self.

"But all this doesn't tell me how you came to hang on to our side-ladder," I inquired, in the hardly audible murmurs we used, after he had told me something more of the proceedings on board the *Sephora* once the bad weather was over.

"When we sighted Java Head I had had time to think all those matters out several times over. I had six weeks of doing nothing else, and with only an hour or so every evening for a tramp on the quarter-deck."

He whispered, his arms folded on the side of my bed-place, staring through the open port. And I could imag-

ine perfectly the manner of this thinking out—a stubborn if not a steadfast operation; something of which I should have been perfectly incapable.

"I reckoned it would be dark before we closed with the land," he continued, so low that I had to strain my hearing, near as we were to each other, shoulder touching shoulder almost. "So I asked to speak to the old man. He always seemed very sick when he came to see me—as if he could not look me in the face. You know, that foresail saved the ship. She was too deep to have run long under bare poles. And it was I that managed to set it for him. Anyway, he came. When I had him in my cabin—he stood by the door looking at me as if I had the halter around my neck already—I asked him right away to leave my cabin door unlocked at night while the ship was going through Sunda Straits. There would be the Java coast within two or three miles, off Angier Point. I wanted nothing more. I've had a prize for swimming my second year in the Conway."

"I can believe it," I breathed out.

"God only knows why they locked me in every night. To see some of their faces you'd have thought they were afraid I'd go about at night strangling people. Am I a murdering brute? Do I look it? By Jove! if I had been he wouldn't have trusted himself like that inside my room. You'll say I might have chucked him aside and bolted out, there and then—it was dark already. Well, no. And for the same reason I wouldn't think of trying to smash the door. There would have been a rush to stop me at the noise, and I did not mean to get into a confounded scrimmage. Somebody else might have got killed—for I would not have broken out only to get chucked back in, and I did not want any more of that work. He refused, looking more sick than ever. He was afraid of the men, and also of that old second mate of his who had been sailing with him for years—a gray-headed old humbug;

and his steward, too, had been with him devil knows how long—seventeen years or more—a dogmatic sort of loafer who hated me like poison, just because I was chief mate. No chief mate ever made more than one voyage in the *Sephora,* you know. Those two old chaps ran the ship. Devil only knows what the skipper wasn't afraid of (all his nerve went to pieces altogether in that hellish spell of bad weather we had)—of what the law would do to him—of his wife, perhaps. Oh, yes! she's on board. Though I don't think she would have meddled. She would have been only too glad to have me out of the ship in any way. The 'brand of Cain' business, don't you see. I was ready enough to go off wandering on the face of the earth—and that was price enough to pay for an Abel of that sort. Anyhow, he wouldn't listen to me. 'This thing must take its course. I represent the law here.' He was shaking like a leaf. 'So you won't?' 'No!' 'Then I hope you will be able to sleep on that,' I said, and turned my back on him. 'I wonder that *you* can,' cries he, and locks the door.

"Well, after that, I couldn't. Not very well. That was three weeks ago. We have had a slow passage through the Java Sea; drifted about Carimata for ten days. When we anchored here they thought, I suppose, that it was all right. The nearest land (and that's five miles) is the ship's destination; the consul would soon set about catching me; and there would have been no object in bolting to these islets here. I don't suppose there's a drop of water on them. I don't know how it was, but to-night that steward, after bringing me my supper, went out to let me eat it, and left the door unlocked. And I ate it—all there was, too. After I had finished I strolled out on the quarter-deck. I don't know that I meant to do anything. A breath of fresh air was all I wanted, I believe. Then a sudden temptation came over me. I kicked off my slippers and was in the water before I had made up my

mind fairly. Somebody heard the splash and they raised an awful hullabaloo. 'He's gone! Lower the boats! He's committed suicide. No, he's swimming.' Certainly I was swimming. It's not so easy for a swimmer like me to commit suicide by drowning. I landed on the nearest islet before the boat left the ship's side. I heard them pulling about in the dark, hailing, and so on, but after a bit they gave it up. Everything quieted down, and the anchorage became as still as death. I sat down on a stone and began to think. I felt certain they would start searching for me at daylight. There was no place to hide on those stony things—and if there had been, what would have been the good? But now I was clear of that ship, I was not going back. So after a while I took off all my clothes, tied them in a bundle with a stone inside, and dropped them in the deep water on the outer side of that islet. That was suicide enough for me. Let them think what they liked, but I didn't mean to drown myself. I meant to swim till I sank—but that's not the same thing. I struck out for another of these little islets, and it was from that one that I first saw your riding-light. Something to swim for. I went on easily, and on the way I came upon a flat rock a foot or two above the water. In the daytime, I dare say, you might make it out with a glass from your poop. I scrambled up on it and rested myself for a bit. Then I made another start. That last spell must have been over a mile."

His whisper was getting fainter and fainter, and all the time he stared straight out through the porthole, in which there was not even a star to be seen. I had not interrupted him. There was something that made comment impossible in his narrative; or perhaps in himself; a sort of feeling, a quality, which I can't find a name for. And when he ceased, all I found was a futile whisper: "So you swam for our light?"

"Yes—straight for it. It was something to swim for.

I couldn't see any stars low down because the coast was in the way, and I couldn't see the land, either. The water was like glass. One might have been swimming in a confounded thousand-feet deep cistern with no place for scrambling out anywhere; but what I didn't like was the prospect of swimming round and round like a crazed bullock before I gave out; and as I didn't mean to go back . . . No. Do you see me being hauled back, stark naked, off one of these little islands by the scruff of the neck and fighting like a wild beast? Somebody would have got killed for certain, and I did not want any of that. So I went on. Then your ladder——"

"Why didn't you hail the ship?" I asked, a little louder.

He touched my shoulder lightly. Lazy footsteps came right over our heads and stopped. The second mate had crossed from the other side of the poop and might have been hanging over the rail, for all we knew.

"He couldn't hear us talking—could he?" my double breathed into my ear, anxiously.

His anxiety was an answer, a sufficient answer, to the question I had put to him. An answer containing all the difficulty of the situation. I closed the porthole quietly, to make sure. A louder word might have been overheard.

"Who's that?" he whispered then.

"My second mate. But I don't know much more about the fellow than you do."

And I told him a little about myself. I had been appointed to take charge while I least expected anything of the sort, not quite a fortnight ago. I didn't know either the ship or the people. Hadn't had time in port to look about me or size anybody up. And as to the crew, all they knew was that I was appointed to take the ship home. For the rest, I was almost as much of a stranger on board as himself, I said. And at the moment I felt it most

acutely. I felt that it would take very little to make me a suspect person in the eyes of the ship's company.

He had turned about meanwhile; and we, the two strangers in the ship, faced each other in identical attitudes.

"Your ladder——" he murmured, after a silence. "Who'd have thought of finding a ladder hanging over at night in a ship anchored out here! I felt just then a very unpleasant faintness. After the life I've been leading for nine weeks, anybody would have got out of condition. I wasn't capable of swimming around as far as your rudder-chains. And lo and behold! there was a ladder to get hold of. After I gripped it I said to myself, 'What's the good?' When I saw a man's head looking over I thought I would swim away presently and leave him shouting—in whatever language it was. I didn't mind being looked at. I—I liked it. And then you speaking to me so quietly—as if you had expected me—made me hold on a little longer. It had been a confoundedly lonely time—I don't mean while swimming. I was glad to talk a little to somebody that didn't belong to the *Sephora*. As to asking for the captain, that was a mere impulse. It could have been no use, with all the ship knowing about me and the other people pretty certain to be around here in the morning. I don't know—I wanted to be seen, to talk to somebody, before I went on. I don't know what I would have said. . . . 'Fine night, isn't it?' or something of the sort."

"Do you think they will be around here presently?" I asked with some incredulity.

"Quite likely," he said, faintly.

He looked extremely haggard all of a sudden. His head rolled on his shoulders.

"H'm. We shall see then. Meanwhile get into that bed," I whispered. "Want help? There."

It was a rather high bed-place with a set of drawers un-

derneath. This amazing swimmer really needed the lift I gave him by seizing his leg. He tumbled in, rolled over on his back, and flung one arm across his eyes. And then, with his face nearly hidden, he must have looked exactly as I used to look in that bed. I gazed upon my other self for a while before drawing across carefully the two green serge curtains which ran on a brass rod. I thought for a moment of pinning them together for greater safety, but I sat down on the couch, and once there I felt unwilling to rise and hunt for a pin. I was extremely tired, in a peculiarly intimate way, by the strain of stealthiness, by the effort of whispering and the general secrecy of this excitement. It was three o'clock now and I had been on my feet since nine, but I was not sleepy; I could not have gone to sleep. I sat there, fagged out, looking at the curtains, trying to clear my mind of the confused sensation of being in two places at once, and greatly bothered by an exasperating knocking in my head. It was a relief to discover suddenly that it was not in my head at all, but on the outside of the door. Before I could collect myself the words "Come in" were out of my mouth, and the steward entered with a tray, bringing in my morning coffee. I had slept, after all, and I was so frightened that I shouted, "This way! I am here, steward," as though he had been miles away. He put down the tray on the table next the couch and only then said, very quietly, "I can see you are here, sir." I felt him give me a keen look, but I dared not meet his eyes just then. He must have wondered why I had drawn the curtains of my bed before going to sleep on the couch. He went out, hooking the door open as usual.

I heard the crew washing the decks above me. I knew I would have been told at once if there had been any wind. Calm, I thought, and I was doubly vexed. Indeed, I felt more dual than ever. The steward reappeared suddenly in the doorway. I jumped up from the couch so quickly that he gave a start.

"What do you want here?"

"Close your port, sir—they are washing decks."

"It is closed," I said, reddening.

"Very well, sir." But he did not move from the doorway and returned my stare in an extraordinary, equivocal manner for a time. Then his eyes wavered, all his expression changed, and in a voice unusually gentle, almost coaxingly:

"May I come in to take the empty cup away, sir?"

"Of course!" I turned my back on him while he popped in and out. Then I unhooked and closed the door and even pushed the bolt. This sort of thing could not go on very long. The cabin was as hot as an oven, too. I took a peep at my double, and discovered that he had not moved, his arm was still over his eyes; but his chest heaved; his hair was wet; his chin glistened with perspiration. I reached over him and opened the port.

"I must show myself on deck," I reflected.

Of course, theoretically, I could do what I liked, with no one to say me nay within the whole circle of the horizon; but to lock my cabin door and take the key away I did not dare. Directly I put my head out of the companion I saw the group of my two officers, the second mate barefooted, the chief mate in long india-rubber boots, near the break of the poop, and the steward halfway down the poop-ladder talking to them eagerly. He happened to catch sight of me and dived, the second ran down on the main-deck shouting some order or other, and the chief mate came to meet me, touching his cap.

There was a sort of curiosity in his eye that I did not like. I don't know whether the steward had told them that I was "queer" only, or downright drunk, but I know the man meant to have a good look at me. I watched him coming with a smile which, as he got into point-blank range, took effect and froze his very whiskers. I did not give him time to open his lips.

"Square the yards by lifts and braces before the hands go to breakfast."

It was the first particular order I had given on board that ship; and I stayed on deck to see it executed, too. I had felt the need of asserting myself without loss of time. That sneering young cub got taken down a peg or two on that occasion, and I also seized the opportunity of having a good look at the face of every foremast man as they filed past me to go to the after braces. At breakfast time, eating nothing myself, I presided with such frigid dignity that the two mates were only too glad to escape from the cabin as soon as decency permitted; and all the time the dual working of my mind distracted me almost to the point of insanity. I was constantly watching myself, my secret self, as dependent on my actions as my own personality, sleeping in that bed, behind that door which faced me as I sat at the head of the table. It was very much like being mad, only it was worse because one was aware of it.

I had to shake him for a solid minute, but when at last he opened his eyes it was in the full possession of his senses, with an inquiring look.

"All's well so far," I whispered. "Now you must vanish into the bath-room."

He did so, as noiseless as a ghost, and I then rang for the steward, and facing him boldly, directed him to tidy up my stateroom while I was having my bath— "and be quick about it." As my tone admitted of no excuses, he said, "Yes, sir," and ran off to fetch his dust-pan and brushes. I took a bath and did most of my dressing, splashing, and whistling softly for the steward's edification, while the secret sharer of my life stood drawn up bolt upright in that little space, his face looking very sunken in daylight, his eyelids lowered under the stern, dark line of his eyebrows drawn together by a slight frown.

When I left him there to go back to my room, the

steward was finishing the dusting. I sent for the mate and engaged him in some insignificant conversation. It was, as it were, trifling with the terrific character of his whiskers; but my object was to give him an opportunity for a good look at my cabin. And then I could at last shut, with a clear conscience, the door of my stateroom and get my double back into the recessed part. There was nothing else for it. He had to sit still on a small folding stool, half smothered by heavy coats hanging there. We listened to the steward going into the bath-room out of the saloon, filling the water-bottles there, scrubbing down the bath, setting things to rights, whisk, bang, clatter—out again into the saloon—turn the key—click. Such was my scheme for keeping my second self invisible. Nothing better could be contrived under the circumstances. And there we sat; I at my writing desk, ready to appear busy with some papers, he behind me, out of sight of the door. It would not have been prudent to talk in daytime; and I could not have stood the excitement of that queer sense of whispering to myself. Now and then, glancing back over my shoulder, I saw him far back there, sitting rigidly on the low stool, his bare feet close together, his arms folded, his head hanging on his breast—and perfectly still. Anybody would have taken him for me.

I was fascinated by it myself. Every moment I had to glance over my shoulder. I was looking at him when a voice outside the door said:

"Beg pardon, sir."

"Well!" . . . I kept my eyes on him, and so, when the voice outside the door announced, "There's a ship's boat coming our way, sir," I saw him give a start—the first movement he had made for hours. But he did not raise his bowed head.

"All right. Get the ladder over."

I hesitated. Should I whisper something to him?

But what? His immobility seemed to have been never disturbed. What could I tell him he did not know already? . . . Finally I went on deck.

II

The skipper of the *Sephora* had a thin red whisker all round his face, and the sort of complexion that goes with hair of that color; also the particular, rather smeary shade of blue in the eyes. He was not exactly a showy figure; his shoulders were high, his stature but middling—one leg slightly more bandy than the other. He shook hands, looking vaguely around. A spiritless tenacity was his main characteristic, I judged. I behaved with a politeness which seemed to disconcert him. Perhaps he was shy. He mumbled to me as if he were ashamed of what he was saying; gave his name (it was something like Archbold—but at this distance of years I am hardly sure), his ship's name, and a few other particulars of that sort, in the manner of a criminal making a reluctant and doleful confession. He had had terrible weather on the passage out—terrible—terrible—wife aboard, too.

By this time we were seated in the cabin and the steward brought in a tray with a bottle and glasses. "Thanks! No!" Never took liquor. Would have some water, though. He drank two tumblerfuls. Terrible thirsty work. Ever since daylight had been exploring the islands round his ship.

"What was that for—fun?" I asked, with an appearance of polite interest.

"No!" He sighed. "Painful duty."

As he persisted in his mumbling and I wanted my double to hear every word, I hit upon the notion of informing him that I regretted to say I was hard of hearing.

"Such a young man, too!" he nodded, keeping his smeary blue, unintelligent eyes fastened upon me. What was the cause of it—some disease? he inquired, without

the least sympathy and as if he thought that, if so, I'd got no more than I deserved.

"Yes; disease," I admitted in a cheerful tone which seemed to shock him. But my point was gained, because he had to raise his voice to give me his tale. It is not worth while to record that version. It was just over two months since all this had happened, and he had thought so much about it that he seemed completely muddled as to its bearings, but still immensely impressed.

"What would you think of such a thing happening on board your own ship? I've had the *Sephora* for these fifteen years. I am a well-known shipmaster."

He was densely distressed—and perhaps I should have sympathized with him if I had been able to detach my mental vision from the unsuspected sharer of my cabin as though he were my second self. There he was on the other side of the bulkhead, four or five feet from us, no more, as we sat in the saloon. I looked politely at Captain Archbold (if that was his name), but it was the other I saw, in a gray sleeping-suit, seated on a low stool, his bare feet close together, his arms folded, and every word said between us falling into the ears of his dark head bowed on his chest.

"I have been at sea now, man and boy, for seven-and-thirty years, and I've never heard of such a thing happening in an English ship. And that it should be my ship. Wife on board, too."

I was hardly listening to him.

"Don't you think," I said, "that the heavy sea which, you told me, came aboard just then might have killed the man? I have seen the sheer weight of a sea kill a man very neatly, by simply breaking his neck."

"Good God!" he uttered impressively, fixing his smeary blue eyes on me. "The sea! No man killed by the sea ever looked like that." He seemed positively scandalized by my suggestion. And as I gazed at him, certainly

not prepared for anything original on his part, he advanced his head close to mine and thrust his tongue out at me so suddenly that I couldn't help starting back.

After scoring over my calmness in this graphic way, he nodded wisely. If I had seen the sight, he assured me, I would never forget it as long as I lived. The weather was too bad to give the corpse a proper sea burial. So next day at dawn they took it up on the poop, covering its face with a bit of bunting; he read a short prayer, and then, just as it was, in its oilskins and long boots, they launched it amongst those mountainous seas that seemed ready every moment to swallow up the ship herself and the terrified lives on board of her.

"That reefed foresail saved you," I threw in.

"Under God—it did," he exclaimed fervently. "It was by a special mercy, I firmly believe, that it stood some of those hurricane squalls."

"It was the setting of that sail which——" I began.

"God's own hand in it," he interrupted me. "Nothing less could have done it. I don't mind telling you that I hardly dared give the order. It seemed impossible that we could touch anything without losing it, and then our last hope would have been gone."

The terror of that gale was on him yet. I let him go on for a bit, then said, casually—as if returning to a minor subject:

"You were very anxious to give up your mate to the shore people, I believe?"

He was. To the law. His obscure tenacity on that point had in it something incomprehensible and a little awful; something, as it were, mystical, quite apart from his anxiety that he should not be suspected of "countenancing any doings of that sort." Seven-and-thirty virtuous years at sea, of which over twenty of immaculate command, and the last fifteen in the *Sephora,* seemed to have laid him under some pitiless obligation.

"And you know," he went on, groping shamefacedly among his feelings, "I did not engage that young fellow. His people had some interest with my owners. I was in a way forced to take him on. He looked very smart, very gentlemanly, and all that. But do you know—I never liked him, somehow. I am a plain man. You see, he wasn't exactly the sort for the chief mate of a ship like the *Sephora*."

I had become so connected in thoughts and impressions with the secret sharer of my cabin that I felt as if I, personally, were being given to understand that I, too, was not the sort that would have done for chief mate of a ship like the *Sephora*. I had no doubt of it in my mind.

"Not at all the style of man. You understand," he insisted, superfluously, looking hard at me.

I smiled urbanely. He seemed at a loss for a while.

"I suppose I must report a suicide."

"Beg pardon?"

"Sui-cide! That's what I'll have to write to my owners directly I get in."

"Unless you manage to recover him before to-morrow," I assented, dispassionately. . . . "I mean, alive."

My lack of excitement, of curiosity, of surprise, of any sort of pronounced interest, began to arouse his distrust. But except for the felicitous pretense of deafness I had not tried to pretend anything. I had felt utterly incapable of playing the part of ignorance properly, and therefore was afraid to try. It is also certain that he had brought some ready-made suspicions with him, and that he viewed my politeness as a strange and unnatural phenomenon. And yet how else could I have received him? Not heartily! That was impossible for psychological reasons, which I need not state here. My only object was to keep off his inquiries. Surlily? Yes, but surliness might have provoked a point-blank question. From its novelty to him and from its nature, punctilious courtesy

was the manner best calculated to restrain the man. But there was danger of his breaking through my defense bluntly. I could not, I think, have met him by a direct lie, also for psychological (not moral) reasons. If he had only known how afraid I was of his putting my feeling of identity with the other to the test! But, strangely enough (I thought of it only afterwards), I believe that he was not a little disconcerted by the reverse side of that weird situation, by something in me that reminded him of the man he was seeking—suggested a mysterious similitude to the young fellow he had disturbed and disliked from the first.

However that might have been, the silence was not very prolonged. He took another oblique step.

"I reckon I had no more than a two-mile pull to your ship. Not a bit more."

"And quite enough, too, in this awful heat," I said.

Another pause full of mistrust followed. Necessity, they say, is mother of invention, but fear, too, is not barren of ingenious suggestions. And I was afraid he would ask me point-blank for news of my other self.

"Nice little saloon, isn't it?" I remarked, as if noticing for the first time the way his eyes roamed from one closed door to the other. "And very well fitted out, too. Here, for instance," I continued, reaching over the back of my seat negligently and flinging the door open, "is my bath-room."

He made an eager movement, but hardly gave it a glance. I got up, shut the door of the bath-room, and invited him to have a look around, as if I were very proud of my accommodation. He had to rise and be shown round, but he went through the business without any raptures whatever.

"And now we'll have a look at my stateroom," I declared, in a voice as loud as I dared make it, crossing the cabin to the starboard side with purposely heavy steps.

He followed me in and gazed around. My intelligent double had vanished. I played my part.

"Very convenient—isn't it?"

"Very nice. Very comf . . ." He didn't finish, and went out brusquely as if to escape from some unrighteous wiles of mine. But it was not to be. I had been too frightened not to feel vengeful; I felt I had him on the run, and I meant to keep him on the run. My polite insistence must have had something menacing in it, because he gave in suddenly. And I did not let him off a single item; mate's room, pantry, storerooms, the very sail-locker which was also under the poop—he had to look in all of them. When at last I showed him out on the quarter-deck he drew a long, spiritless sigh, and mumbled dismally that he must really be going back to his ship now. I desired my mate, who had joined us, to see to the captain's boat.

The man of whiskers gave a blast on the whistle which he used to wear hanging round his neck, and yelled, "*Sephora's* away!" My double down there in my cabin must have heard, and certainly could not feel more relieved than I. Four fellows came running out from somewhere forward and went over the side, while my own men, appearing on deck too, lined the rail. I escorted my visitor to the gangway ceremoniously, and nearly overdid it. He was a tenacious beast. On the very ladder he lingered, and in that unique, guiltily conscientious manner of sticking to the point:

"I say . . . you . . . you don't think that——"

I covered his voice loudly.

"Certainly not . . . I am delighted. Good-bye."

I had an idea of what he meant to say, and just saved myself by the privilege of defective hearing. He was too shaken generally to insist, but my mate, close witness of that parting, looked mystified and his face took on a thoughtful cast. As I did not want to appear as if I

wished to avoid all communication with my affairs, he had the opportunity to address me.

"Seems a very nice man. His boat's crew told our chaps a very extraordinary story, if what I am told by the steward is true. I suppose you had it from the captain, sir?"

"Yes. I had a story from the captain."

"A very horrible affair—isn't it, sir?"

"It is."

"Beats all these tales we hear about murders in Yankee ships."

"I don't think it beats them. I don't think it resembles them in the least."

"Bless my soul—you don't say so! But of course I've no acquaintance whatever with American ships, not I, so I couldn't go against your knowledge. It's horrible enough for me. . . . But the queerest part is that those fellows seemed to have some idea the man was hidden aboard here. They had really. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"Preposterous—isn't it?"

We were walking to and fro athwart the quarter-deck. No one of the crew forward could be seen (the day was Sunday), and the mate pursued:

"There was some little dispute about it. Our chaps took offense. 'As if we would harbor a thing like that,' they said. 'Wouldn't you like to look for him in our coal-hole?' Quite a tiff. But they made it up in the end. I suppose he did drown himself. Don't you, sir?"

"I don't suppose anything."

"You have no doubt in the matter, sir?"

"None whatever."

I left him suddenly. I felt I was producing a bad impression, but with my double down there it was most trying to be on deck. And it was almost as trying to be

below. Altogether a nerve-trying situation. But on the whole I felt less torn in two when I was with him. There was no one in the whole ship whom I dared to take into my confidence. Since the hands had got to know his story, it would have been impossible to pass him off for any one else, and an accidental discovery was to be dreaded now more than ever . . .

The steward being engaged in laying the table for dinner, we could talk only with our eyes when I first went down. Later in the afternoon we had a cautious try at whispering. The Sunday stillness of the ship was against us; the stillness of air and water around her was against us; the elements, the men were against us—everything was against us in our secret partnership; time itself—for this could not go on forever. The very trust in Providence was, I suppose, denied to his guilt. Shall I confess that this thought cast me down very much. And as to the chapter of accidents which counts for so much in the book of success, I could only hope that it was closed. For what favorable accident could be expected?

"Did you hear everything?" were my first words as soon as we took up our position side by side, leaning over my bed-place.

He had. And the proof of it was his earnest whisper, "The man told you he hardly dared give the order."

I understood the reference to be to that saving foresail.

"Yes. He was afraid of it being lost in the setting."

"I assure you he never gave the order. He may think he did, but he never gave it. He stood there with me on the break of the poop after the maintopsail blew away, and whimpered about our last hope—positively whimpered about it and nothing else—and the night coming on! To hear one's skipper go on like that in such weather was enough to drive any fellow out of his mind. It worked me up into a sort of desperation. I just took it into my own hands and went away from him, boiling,

and—— But what's the use telling you? *You* know! . . . Do you think that if I had not been pretty fierce with them I should have got the men to do anything? Not it! The bos'n perhaps? Perhaps! It wasn't a heavy sea—it was a sea gone mad! I suppose the end of the world will be something like that; and a man may have the heart to see it coming once and be done with it—but to have to face it day after day—I don't blame anybody. I was precious little better than the rest. Only—I was an officer of that old coal-wagon, anyhow——"

"I quite understand," I conveyed that sincere assurance into his ear. He was out of breath with whispering; I could hear him pant slightly. It was all very simple. The same strung-up force which had given twenty-four men a chance, at least, for their lives, had, in a sort of recoil, crushed an unworthy mutinous existence.

But I had no leisure to weigh the merits of the matter —— Footsteps in the saloon, a heavy knock. "There's enough wind to get under way with, sir." Here was the call of a new claim upon my thoughts and even upon my feelings.

"Turn the hands up," I cried through the door. "I'll be on deck directly."

I was going out to make the acquaintance of my ship. Before I left the cabin our eyes met—the eyes of the only two strangers on board. I pointed to the recessed part where the little camp-stool awaited him and laid my finger on my lips. He made a gesture—somewhat vague—a little mysterious, accompanied by a faint smile, as if of regret.

This is not the place to enlarge upon the sensations of a man who feels for the first time a ship move under his feet to his own independent word. In my case they were not unalloyed. I was not wholly alone with my command; for there was that stranger in my cabin. Or, rather, I was not completely and wholly with her. Part of me was

absent. That mental feeling of being in two places at once affected me physically as if the mood of secrecy had penetrated my very soul. Before an hour had elapsed since the ship had begun to move, having occasion to ask the mate (he stood by my side) to take a compass bearing of the Pagoda, I caught myself reaching up to his ear in whispers. I say I caught myself, but enough had escaped to startle the man. I can't describe it otherwise than by saying he shied. A grave, preoccupied manner, as though he were in possession of some perplexing intelligence, did not leave him henceforth. A little later I moved away from the rail to look at the compass with such a stealthy gait that the helmsman noticed it—and I could not help noticing the unusual roundness of his eyes. These are trifling instances, though it's to no commander's advantage to be suspected of ludicrous eccentricities. But I was also more seriously affected. There are to a seaman certain words, gestures, that should in given conditions come as naturally, as instinctively as the winking of a menaced eye. A certain order should spring on to his lips without thinking; a certain sign should get itself made, so to speak, without reflection. But all unconscious alertness had abandoned me. I had to make an effort of will to recall myself back (from the cabin) to the conditions of the moment. I felt that I was appearing an irresolute commander to those people who were watching me more or less critically.

And, besides, there were the scares. On the second day out, for instance, coming off the deck in the afternoon (I had straw slippers on my bare feet) I stopped at the open pantry door and spoke to the steward. He was doing something there with his back to me. At the sound of my voice he nearly jumped out of his skin, as the saying is, and incidentally broke a cup.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" I asked, astonished.

He was extremely confused. "Beg your pardon, sir. I made sure you were in your cabin."

"You see I wasn't."

"No, sir. I could have sworn I had heard you moving in there not a moment ago. It's most extraordinary . . . very sorry, sir."

I passed on with an inward shudder. I was so identified with my secret double that I did not even mention the fact in those scanty, fearful whispers we exchanged. I suppose he had made some slight noise of some kind or other. It would have been miraculous if he hadn't at one time or another. And yet, haggard as he appeared, he looked always perfectly self-controlled, more than calm—almost invulnerable. On my suggestion he remained almost entirely in the bath-room, which, upon the whole, was the safest place. There could be really no shadow of an excuse for any one ever wanting to go in there, once the steward had done with it. It was a very tiny place. Sometimes he reclined on the floor, his legs bent, his head sustained on one elbow. At others I would find him on the camp-stool, sitting in his gray sleeping-suit and with his cropped dark hair like a patient, unmoved convict. At night I would smuggle him into my bed-place and we would whisper together, with the regular footfalls of the officer of the watch passing and repassing over our heads. It was an infinitely miserable time. It was lucky that some tins of fine preserves were stowed in a locker in my stateroom: hard bread I could always get hold of; and so he lived on stewed chicken, pâte de foie gras, asparagus, cooked oysters, sardines—on all sorts of abominable sham delicacies out of tins. My early morning coffee he always drank; and it was all I dared do for him in that respect.

Every day there was the horrible manœuvering to go through with so that my room and then the bath-room should be done in the usual way. I came to hate the

sight of the steward, to abhor the voice of that harmless man. I felt that it was he who would bring on the disaster of discovery. It hung like a sword over our heads.

The fourth day out, I think (we were then working down the east side of the Gulf of Siam)—the fourth day, I say, of this miserable juggling with the unavoidable, as we sat at our evening meal, that man, whose slightest movement I dreaded, after putting down the dishes, ran up on deck busily. This could not be dangerous. Presently he came down again; and then it appeared that he had remembered a coat of mine which I had thrown over a rail to dry after having been wetted in a shower which had passed over the ship in the afternoon. Sitting stolidly at the head of the table I became terrified at the sight of the garment on his arm. Of course he made for my door. There was no time to lose.

"Steward," I thundered. My nerves were so shaken that I could not govern my voice and conceal my agitation. This was the sort of thing that made my terrifically whiskered mate tap his forehead with his forefinger. I had detected him using that gesture while talking on deck with a confidential air to the carpenter. It was too far to hear a word, but I had no doubt that this pantomime could only refer to the strange new captain.

"Yes, sir," the pale-faced steward turned resignedly to me. It was this maddening course of being shouted at, checked without rhyme or reason, arbitrarily chased out of my cabin, suddenly called into it, sent flying out of his pantry on incomprehensible errands, that accounted for the growing wretchedness of his expression.

"Where are you going with that coat?"

"To your room, sir."

"Is there another shower coming?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir. Shall I go up again and see, sir?"

"No! Never mind."

My object was attained, as of course my other self in there would have heard everything that passed. During this interlude my two officers never raised their eyes off their respective plates; but the lip of that confounded cub, the second mate, quivered visibly.

I expected the steward to hook my coat on and come out at once. He was very slow about it; but I dominated my nervousness sufficiently not to shout after him. Suddenly I became aware (it could be heard plainly enough) that the fellow for some reason or other was opening the door of the bath-room. It was the end. The place was literally not big enough to swing a cat in. My voice died in my throat and I went stony all over. I expected to hear a yell of surprise and terror, and made a movement, but had not the strength to get to my legs. Everything remained still. Had my second self taken the poor wretch by the throat? I don't know what I would have done next moment if I had not seen the steward come out of my room, close the door, and then stand quietly by the sideboard.

"Saved," I thought. "But, no! Lost! Gone! He was gone!"

I laid my knife and fork down and leaned back in my chair. My head swam. After a while, when sufficiently recovered to speak in a steady voice, I instructed my mate to put the ship round at eight o'clock himself.

"I won't come on deck," I went on. "I think I'll turn in, and unless the wind shifts I don't want to be disturbed before midnight. I feel a bit seedy."

"You did look middling bad a little while ago," the chief mate remarked without showing any great concern.

They both went out, and I stared at the steward clearing the table. There was nothing to be read on that wretched man's face. But why did he avoid my eyes, I asked myself. Then I thought I should like to hear the sound of his voice.

"Steward!"

"Sir!" Startled as usual.

"Where did you hang up that coat?"

"In the bath-room, sir." The usual anxious tone. "It's not quite dry yet, sir."

For some time longer I sat in the cuddy. Had my double vanished as he had come? But of his coming there was an explanation, whereas his disappearance would be inexplicable. . . . I went slowly into my dark room, shut the door, lighted the lamp, and for a time dared not turn round. When at last I did, I saw him standing bolt-upright in the narrow recessed part. It would not be true to say I had a shock, but an irresistible doubt of his bodily existence flitted through my mind. Can it be, I asked myself, that he is not visible to other eyes than mine? It was like being haunted. Motionless, with a grave face, he raised his hands slightly at me in a gesture which meant clearly, "Heavens! what a narrow escape!" Narrow indeed. I think I had come creeping quietly as near insanity as any man who has not actually gone over the border. That gesture restrained me, so to speak.

The mate with the terrific whiskers was now putting the ship on the other tack. In the moment of profound silence which follows upon the hands going to their stations I heard on the poop his raised voice: "Hard alee!" and the distant shout of the order repeated on the main-deck. The sails, in that light breeze, made but a faint fluttering noise. It ceased. The ship was coming round slowly; I held my breath in the renewed stillness of expectation; one wouldn't have thought that there was a single living soul on her decks. A sudden brisk shout, "Mainsail haul!" broke the spell, and in the noisy cries and rush overhead of the men running away with the main-brace we two, down in my cabin, came together in our usual position by the bed-place.

He did not wait for my question. "I heard him fumbling here and just managed to squat myself down in the bath," he whispered to me. "The fellow only opened the door and put his arm in to hang the coat up. All the same——"

"I never thought of that," I whispered back, even more appalled than before at the closeness of the shave, and marvelling at that something unyielding in his character which was carrying him through so finely. There was no agitation in his whisper. Whoever was being driven distracted, it was not he. He was sane. And the proof of his sanity was continued when he took up the whispering again.

"It would never do for me to come to life again."

It was something that a ghost might have said. But what he was alluding to was his old captain's reluctant admission of the theory of suicide. It would obviously serve his turn—if I understood at all the view which seemed to govern the unalterable purpose of his action.

"You must maroon me as soon as ever you can get amongst these islands off the Cambodje shore," he went on.

"Maroon you! We are not living in a boy's adventure tale," I protested. His scornful whispering took me up.

"We aren't indeed! There's nothing of a boy's tale in this. But there's nothing else for it. I want no more. You don't suppose I am afraid of what can be done to me? Prison or gallows or whatever they may please. But you don't see me coming back to explain such things to an old fellow in a wig and twelve respectable tradesmen, do you? What can they know whether I'm guilty or not —or of *what* I'm guilty, either? That's my affair. What does the Bible say? 'Driven off the face of the earth.' Very well. I am off the face of the earth now. As I came at night, so I shall go."

"Impossible!" I murmured. "You can't."

"Can't? . . . Not naked like a soul on the Day of Judgment. I shall freeze on to this sleeping-suit. The Last Day is not yet—and . . . you have understood thoroughly. Didn't you?"

I felt suddenly ashamed of myself. I may say truly that I understood—and my hesitation in letting that man swim away from my ship's side had been a mere sham sentiment, a sort of cowardice.

"It can't be done now till next night," I breathed out. "The ship is on the off-shore tack and the wind may fail us."

"As long as I know that you understand," he whispered. "But of course you do. It's a great satisfaction to have got somebody to understand. You seem to have been there on purpose." And in the same whisper, as if we two, whenever we talked, had to say things which were not fit for the world to hear, he added, "It's very wonderful."

We remained side by side talking in our secret way—but sometimes silent or just exchanging a whispered word or two at long intervals. And as usual he stared through the port. A breath of wind came now and again into our faces. The ship might have been moored in dock, so gently and on an even keel she slipped through the water, that did not murmur even at our passage, shadowy and silent like a phantom sea.

At midnight I went on deck, and to my mate's great surprise put the ship round on the other tack. His terrible whiskers flitted round me in silent criticism. I certainly should not have done it if it had been only a question of getting out of that sleepy gulf as quickly as possible. I believe he told the second mate, who relieved him, that it was a great want of judgment. The other only yawned. That intolerable cub shuffled about so sleepily and lolled against the rails in such a slack, improper fashion that I came down on him sharply.

"Aren't you properly awake yet?"

"Yes, sir! I am awake."

"Well, then, be good enough to hold yourself as if you were. And keep a look-out. If there's any current we'll be closing with some islands before daylight."

The east side of the gulf is fringed with islands, some solitary, others in groups. On the blue background of the high coast they seem to float on silvery patches of calm water, arid and gray, or dark green and rounded like clumps of evergreen bushes, with the larger ones, a mile or two long, showing the outlines of ridges, ribs of gray rock under the dark mantle of matted leafage. Unknown to trade, to travel, almost to geography, the manner of life they harbor is an unsolved secret. There must be villages —settlements of fishermen at least—on the largest of them, and some communication with the world is probably kept up by native craft. But all that forenoon, as we headed for them, fanned along by the faintest of breezes, I saw no sign of man or canoe in the field of the telescope I kept pointed on the scattered group.

At noon I gave no orders for a change of course, and the mate's whiskers became much concerned and seemed to be offering themselves unduly to my notice. At last I said:

"I am going to stand right in. Quite in—as far as I can take her."

The stare ofextreme surprise imparted an air of ferocity also to his eyes, and he looked truly terrific for a moment.

"We're not doing well in the middle of the gulf," I continued casually. "I am going to look for the land breezes to-night."

"Bless my soul! Do you mean, sir, in the dark amongst the lot of them islands and reefs and shoals?"

"Well—if there are any regular land breezes at all on

this coast one must get close inshore to find them, mustn't one?"

"Bless my soul!" he exclaimed again under his breath. All that afternoon he wore a dreamy, contemplative appearance which in him was a mark of perplexity. After dinner I went into my stateroom as if I meant to take some rest. There we two bent our dark heads over a half-unrolled chart lying on my bed.

"There," I said. "It's got to be Koh-ring. I've been looking at it since sunrise. It has got two hills and a low point. It must be inhabited. And on the coast opposite there is what looks like the mouth of a biggish river—with some town, no doubt, not far up. It's the best chance for you that I can see."

"Anything. Koh-ring let it be."

He looked thoughtfully at the chart as if surveying chances and distances from a lofty height—and following with his eyes his own figure wandering on the blank land of Cochin-China, and then passing off that piece of paper clean out of sight into uncharted regions. And it was as if the ship had two captains to plan her course for her. I had been so worried and restless running up and down that I had not had the patience to dress that day. I had remained in my sleeping-suit, with straw slippers and a soft floppy hat. The closeness of the heat in the gulf had been most oppressive, and the crew were used to seeing me wandering in that airy attire.

"She will clear the south point as she heads now," I whispered into his ear. "Goodness only knows when, but certainly after dark. I'll edge her in to half a mile, as far as I may be able to judge in the dark——"

"Be careful," he murmured, warningly—and I realized suddenly that all my future, the only future for which I was fit, would perhaps go irretrievably to pieces in any mishap to my first command.

I could not stop a moment longer in the room. I motioned him to get out of sight and made my way on the poop. That unplayful cub had the watch. I walked up and down for a while thinking things out, then beckoning him over.

"Send a couple of hands to open the two quarter-deck ports," I said mildly.

He actually had the impudence, or else so forgot himself in his wonder at such an incomprehensible order, as to repeat:

"Open the quarter-deck ports! What for, sir?"

"The only reason you need concern yourself about is because I tell you to do so. Have them opened wide and fastened properly."

He reddened and went off, but I believe made some jeering remark to the carpenter as to the sensible practice of ventilating a ship's quarter-deck. I know he popped into the mate's cabin to impart the fact to him because the whiskers came on deck, as it were by chance, and stole glances at me from below—for signs of lunacy or drunkenness, I suppose.

A little before supper, feeling more restless than ever, I rejoined, for a moment, my second self. And to find him sitting so quietly was surprising, like something against nature, inhuman.

I developed my plan in a hurried whisper.

"I shall stand in as close as I dare and then put her round. I shall presently find means to smuggle you out of here into the sail-locker, which communicates with the lobby. But there is an opening, a sort of square for hauling the sails out, which gives straight on the quarter-deck and which is never closed in fine weather, so as to give air to the sails. When the ship's way is deadened in stays and all hands are aft at the main-braces you shall have a clear road to slip out and get overboard through the open quarter-deck port. I've had them both fastened up.

Use a rope's end to lower yourself into the water so as to avoid a splash—you know. It could be heard and cause some beastly complication."

He kept silent for a while, then whispered, "I understand."

"I won't be there to see you go," I began with an effort.

"The rest . . . I only hope I have understood, too."

"You have. From first to last"—and for the first time there seemed to be a faltering, something strained in his whisper. He caught hold of my arm, but the ringing of the supper bell made me start. He didn't, though; he only released his grip.

After supper I didn't come below again till well past eight o'clock. The faint, steady breeze was loaded with dew; and the wet, darkened sails held all there was of propelling power in it. The night, clear and starry, sparkled darkly, and the opaque, lightless patches shifting slowly against the low stars were the drifting islets. On the port bow there was a big one more distant and shadowily imposing by the great space of sky it eclipsed.

On opening the door I had a back view of my very own self looking at a chart. He had come out of the recess and was standing near the table.

"Quite dark enough," I whispered.

He stepped back and leaned against my bed with a level, quiet glance. I sat on the couch. We had nothing to say to each other. Over our heads the officer of the watch moved here and there. Then I heard him move quickly. I knew what that meant. He was making for the companion; and presently his voice was outside my door.

"We are drawing in pretty fast, sir. Land looks rather close."

"Very well," I answered. "I am coming on deck directly."

I waited till he was gone out of the cuddy, then rose. My double moved too. The time had come to exchange

our last whispers, for neither of us was ever to hear the other's natural voice.

"Look here!" I opened a drawer and took out three sovereigns. "Take this, anyhow. I've got six and I'd give you the lot, only I must keep a little money to buy some fruit and vegetables for the crew from native boats as we go through the Sunda Straits."

He shook his head.

"Take it," I urged him, whispering desperately. "No one can tell what——"

He smiled and slapped meaningly the only pocket of the sleeping-jacket. It was not safe, certainly. But I produced a large old silk handkerchief of mine, and tying the three pieces of gold in a corner, pressed it on him. He was touched, I suppose, because he took it at last and tied it quickly round his waist under the jacket, on his bare skin.

Our eyes met; several seconds elapsed, till, our glances still mingled, I extended my hand and turned the lamp out. Then I passed through the cuddy, leaving the door of my room wide open. . . . "Steward!"

He was still lingering in the pantry in the greatness of his zeal, giving a rub-up to a plated cruet stand the last thing before going to bed. Being careful not to wake up the mate, whose room was opposite, I spoke in an undertone.

He looked around anxiously. "Sir!"

"Can you get me a little hot water from the galley?"

"I am afraid, sir, the galley fire's been out for some time now."

"Go and see."

He fled up the stairs.

"Now," I whispered loudly, into the saloon—too loudly, perhaps, but I was afraid I couldn't make a sound. He was by my side in an instant—the double captain slipped past the stairs—through the tiny dark passage . . .

a sliding door. We were in the sail-locker, scrambling on our knees over the sails. A sudden thought struck me. I saw myself wandering barefooted, bareheaded, the sun beating on my dark poll. I snatched off my floppy hat and tried hurriedly in the dark to ram it on my other self. He dodged and fended off silently. I wonder what he thought had come over me before he understood and suddenly desisted. Our hands met gropingly, lingered united in a steady, motionless clasp for a second. . . . No word was breathed by either of us when they separated.

I was standing quietly by the pantry door when the steward returned.

"Sorry, sir. Kettle barely warm. Shall I light the spirit-lamp?"

"Never mind."

I came out on deck slowly. It was now a matter of conscience to shave the land as close as possible—for now he must go overboard whenever the ship was put in stays. Must! There could be no going back for him. After a moment I walked over to leeward and my heart flew into my mouth at the nearness of the land on the bow. Under any other circumstances I would not have held on a minute longer. The second mate had followed me anxiously.

I looked on till I felt I could command my voice.

"She will weather," I said then in a quiet tone.

"Are you going to try that, sir?" he stammered out incredulously.

I took no notice of him and raised my tone just enough to be heard by the helmsman.

"Keep her good full."

"Good full, sir."

The wind fanned my cheek, the sails slept, the world was silent. The strain of watching the dark loom of the land grow bigger and denser was too much for me. I

had shut my eyes—because the ship must go closer. She must! The stillness was intolerable. Were we standing still?

When I opened my eyes the second view started my heart with a thump. The black southern hill of Koh-ring seemed to hang right over the ship like a towering fragment of the everlasting night. On that enormous mass of blackness there was not a gleam to be seen, not a sound to be heard. It was gliding irresistibly toward us and yet seemed already within reach of the hand. I saw the vague figures of the watch grouped in the waist, gazing in awed silence.

"Are you going on, sir?" inquired an unsteady voice at my elbow.

I ignored it. I had to go on.

"Keep her full. Don't check her way. That won't do now," I said warningly.

"I can't see the sails very well," the helmsman answered me, in strange, quavering tones.

Was she close enough? Already she was, I won't say in the shadow of the land, but in the very blackness of it, already swallowed up as it were, gone too close to be recalled, gone from me altogether.

"Give the mate a call," I said to the young man who stood at my elbow as still as death. "And turn all hands up."

My tone had a borrowed loudness reverberated from the height of the land. Several voices cried out together: "We are all on deck, sir."

Then stillness again, with the great shadow gliding closer, towering higher, without a light, without a sound. Such a hush had fallen on the ship that she might have been a bark of the dead floating slowly under the very gate of Erebus.

"My God! Where are we?"

It was the mate moaning at my elbow. He was thun-

derstruck, and as it were deprived of the moral support of his whiskers. He clapped his hands and absolutely cried out, "Lost!"

"Be quiet," I said sternly.

He lowered his tone, but I saw the shadowy gesture of his despair. "What are we doing here?"

"Looking for the land wind."

He made as if to tear his hair and addressed me recklessly.

"She will never get out of it. You have done it, sir. I knew it'd end in something like this. She will never weather, and you are too close now to stay. She'll drift ashore before she's round. O, my God!"

I caught his arm as he was raising it to batter his poor devoted head, and shook it vehemently.

"She's ashore already," he wailed, trying to tear himself away.

"Is she? . . . Keep good full there!"

"Good full, sir," cried the helmsman in a frightened, thin, childlike voice.

I hadn't let go the mate's arm and went on shaking it. "Ready about, do you hear? You go forward"—shake—"and stop there"—shake—"and hold your noise"—shake—"and see these head-sheets properly overhauled"—shake, shake—shake.

And all the time I dared not look toward the land lest my heart should fail me. I released my grip at last and he ran forward as if fleeing for dear life.

I wondered what my double there in the sail-locker thought of this commotion. He was able to hear everything—and perhaps he was able to understand why, on my conscience, it had to be thus close—no less. My first order "Hard alee!" re-echoed ominously under the towering shadow of Koh-ring as if I had shouted in a mountain gorge. And then I watched the land intently. In that smooth water and light wind it was impossible to feel the

ship coming-to. No! I could not feel her. And my second self was making now ready to slip out and lower himself overboard Perhaps he was gone already . . .?

The great black mass brooding over our very mast-heads began to pivot away from the ship's side silently. And now I forgot the secret stranger ready to depart, and remembered only that I was a total stranger to the ship. Would she do it? How was she to be handled?

I swung the mainyard and waited helplessly. She was perhaps stopped, and her very fate hung in the balance, with the black mass of Koh-ring like the gate of the everlasting night towering over her taffrail. What would she do now? Had she way on her yet? I stepped to the side swiftly, and on the shadowy water I could see nothing except a faint phosphorescent flash revealing the glassy smoothness of the sleeping surface. It was impossible to tell—and I had not learned yet the feel of my ship. Was she moving? What I needed was something easily seen, a piece of paper, which I could throw overboard and watch. I had nothing on me. To run down for it I didn't dare. There was no time. All at once my strained, yearning stare distinguished a white object floating within a yard of the ship's side. White on the black water. A phosphorescent flash passed under it. What was that thing? . . . I recognized my own floppy hat. It must have fallen off his head . . . and he didn't bother. Now I had what I wanted—the saving mark for my eyes. But I hardly thought of my other self, now gone from the ship, to be hidden forever from all friendly faces, to be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, with no brand of the curse on his sane forehead to stay a slaying hand . . . too proud to explain.

And I watched the hat—the expression of my sudden pity for his mere flesh. It had been meant to save his homeless head from the dangers of the sun. And now—behold—it was saving the ship, by serving me for a mark

to help out the ignorance of my strangeness. Ha! It was drifting forward, warning me just in time that the ship had gathered sternway.

"Shift the helm," I said in a low voice to the seaman standing like a statue.

The man's eyes glistened wildly in the binnacle light as he jumped around to the other side and spun round the wheel.

I walked to the break of the poop. On the overshadowed deck all hands stood by the forebraces waiting for my order. The stars ahead seemed to be gliding from right to left. And all was so still in the world that I heard the quiet remark "She's round," passed in a tone of intense relief between two seamen.

"Let go and haul."

The foreyards ran round with a great noise, amidst cheery cries. And now the frightful whiskers made themselves heard giving various orders. Already the ship was drawing ahead. And I was alone with her. Nothing! no one in the world should stand now between us, throwing a shadow on the way of silent knowledge and mute affection, the perfect communion of a seaman with his first command.

Walking to the taffrail, I was in time to make out on the very edge of a darkness thrown by a towering black mass like the very gateway of Erebus—yes, I was in time to catch an evanescent glimpse of my white hat left behind to mark the spot where the secret sharer of my cabin and my thoughts, as though he were my second self, had lowered himself into the water to take his punishment: a free man, a proud swimmer striking out for a new destiny.

A START IN LIFE[1]

Ruth Suckow

The Switzers were scurrying around to get Daisy ready by the time that Elmer Kruse should get through in town. They had known all week that Elmer might be in for her any day. But they hadn't done a thing until he appeared. "Oh, it was so rainy to-day, the roads were so muddy, they hadn't thought he'd get in until maybe next week." It would have been the same any other day.

Mrs. Switzer was trying now at the last moment to get all of Daisy's things into the battered telescope that lay open on the bed. The bed had not "got made"; and just as soon as Daisy was gone, Mrs. Switzer would have to hurry off to the Woodworths, where she was to wash to-day. Daisy's things were scattred over the dark brown quilt and the rumpled sheet that were dingy and clammy in this damp weather. So was the whole bedroom, with its sloping ceiling, and old-fashioned square-paned windows, the commode that they used for a dresser littered with pin trays, curlers, broken combs, ribbons, smoky lamp, all mixed up together; the door of the closet open, showing the confusion of clothes and shabby shoes. . . . They all slept in this room—Mrs. Switzer and Dwight in the bed, the two girls in the cot against the wall.

"Mama, I can't find the belt to that plaid dress."

"Oh, ain't it somewheres around? Well, I guess you'll have to let it go. If I come across it I can send it out to you. Someone'll be going past there."

[1]Reprinted from *Iowa Interiors*, by Ruth Suckow, by permission of and arrangement with the author, Alfred A. Knopf., Inc., authorized publishers, and the editors of *The American Mercury*.

She had meant to get Daisy all mended and "fixed up" before she went out to the country. But somehow . . . oh, there was always so much to see to when she came home. Gone all day, washing and cleaning for other people; it didn't leave her much time for her own house.

She was late now. The Woodworths liked to have her get the washing out early so that she could do some cleaning too before she left. But she couldn't help it. She would have to get Daisy off first. She had already had on her wraps ready to go, when Elmer came—her cleaning cap, of a blue faded almost into gray, and the ancient black coat with gathered sleeves that she wore over her work dress when she went out to wash.

"What's become of all your underclothes? They ain't all dirty, are they?"

"They are, too. You didn't wash for us last week, mama."

"Well, you'll just have to take along what you've got. Maybe there'll be some way of getting the rest to you."

"Elmers come in every week, don't they?" Daisy demanded.

"Yes, but maybe they won't always be bringing you in."

She jammed what she could into the telescope, thinking with her helpless, anxious fatalism that it would have to do somehow.

"Daisy, you get yourself ready now."

"I am ready. Mama, I want to put on my other ribbon."

"Oh, that's 'way down in the telescope somewhere. You needn't be so anxious to fix yourself up. This ain't like going visiting."

Daisy stood at the little mirror preening herself—such a homely child, "all Switzer," skinny, with pale sharp eyes set close together and thin, stringy, reddish hair. But she had never really learned yet how homely she was. She was the oldest, and she got the pick of what clothes

were given to the Switzers. Goldie and Dwight envied her. She was important in her small world. She was proud of her blue coat that had belonged to Alice Brooker, the town lawyer's daughter. It hung unevenly above her bony little knees, and the buttons came down too far. Her mother had tried to make it over for her.

Mrs. Switzer looked at her, troubled, but not knowing how she could tell her all the things she ought to be told. Daisy had never been away before except to go to her Uncle Fred's at Lehigh. She seemed to think that this would be the same. She had so many things to learn. Well, she would find them out soon enough—only too soon. Working for other people—she would learn what that meant. Elmer and Edna Kruse were nice young people. They would mean well enough by Daisy. It was a good chance for her to start in. But it wasn't the same.

Daisy was so proud. She thought it was quite a thing to be "starting in to earn." She thought she could buy herself so much with that dollar and a half a week. The other children stood back watching her, round-eyed and impressed. They wished that they were going away, like Daisy.

They heard a car come splashing through the mud on low.

"There he is back! Have you got your things on? Goldie—go out and tell him she's coming."

"No, me tell him, me!" Dwight shouted jealously.

"Well—both of you tell him. Land! . . ."

She tried hastily to put on the cover of the bulging telescope and to fasten the straps. One of them broke.

"Well, you'll have to take it the way it is."

It was an old thing, hadn't been used since her husband, Mert, had "left off canvassing" before he died. And he had worn it all to pieces.

"Well, I guess you'll have to go now. He won't want

to wait. I'll try and send you out what you ain't got with you." She turned to Daisy. Her face was working. There was nothing else to do, as everyone said. Daisy would have to help, and she might as well learn it now. Only, she hated to see Daisy go off, to have her starting in. She knew what it meant. "Well—you try and work good this summer, so they'll want you to stay. I hope they'll bring you in sometimes."

Daisy's homely little face grew pale with awe, suddenly, at the sight of her mother crying, at something that she dimly sensed in the pressure of her mother's thin strong arms. Her vanity in her new importance was somehow shamed and dampened.

Elmer's big new Buick, mud-splashed but imposing, stood tilted on the uneven road. Mud was thick on the wheels. It was a bad day for driving, with the roads a yellow mass, water lying in all the wheel ruts. This little road that led past these few houses on the outskirts of town, and up over the hill, had a cold rainy loneliness. Elmer sat in the front seat of the Buick, and in the back was a big box of groceries.

"Got room to sit in there?" he asked genially. "I didn't get out, it's so muddy here."

"No, don't get out," Mrs. Switzer said hastily. "She can put this right on the floor there in the back." She added, with a timid attempt at courtesy, "Ain't the roads pretty bad out that way?"

"Yes, but farmers get so they don't think so much about the roads."

"I s'pose that's so."

He saw the signs of tears on Mrs. Switzer's face, and they made him anxious to get away. She embraced Daisy hastily again. Daisy climbed over the grocery box and scrunched herself into the seat.

"I guess you'll bring her in with you some time when you're coming," Mrs. Switzer hinted.

"Sure. We'll bring her."

He started the engine. It roared, half died down as the wheels of the car spun in the thick wet mud.

In that moment, Daisy had a startled view of home—the small house standing on a rough rise of land, weathered to a dim color that showed dark streaks from the rain; the narrow sloping front porch whose edge had a soaked gnawed look; the chickens, grayish-black, pecking at the wet ground; their playthings, stones, a wagon, some old pail covers littered about; a soaked, discolored piece of underwear hanging on the line in the back yard. The yard was tussocky and overhung the road with shaggy long grass where the yellow bank was caved in under it. Goldie and Dwight were gazing at her solemnly. She saw her mother's face—a thin, weak, loving face, drawn with neglected weeping, with its reddened eyes and poor teeth . . . in the old coat and heavy shoes and cleaning cap, her work-worn hand with its big knuckles clutching at her coat. She saw the playthings they had used yesterday, and the old swing that hung from one of the trees, the ropes sodden, the seat in crooked. . . .

The car went off, slipping on the wet clay. She waved frantically, suddenly understanding that she was leaving them. They waved at her.

Mrs. Switzer stood there a little while. Then came the harsh rasp of the old black iron pump that stood out under the box elder tree. She was pumping water to leave for the children before she went off to work.

II

Daisy held on as the car skidded going down the short clay hill. Elmer didn't bother with chains. He was too used to the roads. But her eyes brightened with scared excitement. When they were down, and Elmer slowed up going along the tracks in the deep wet grass that led to

the main road, she looked back, holding on her hat with her small scrawny hand.

Just down this little hill—and home was gone. The big car, the feel of her telescope on the floor under her feet, the fact that she was going out to the country, changed the looks of everything. She saw it all now.

Dunkels' house stood on one side of the road. A closed-up white house. The windows stared blank and cold between the old shutters. There was a chair with a broken straw seat under the fruit trees. The Dunkels were old Catholic people who seldom went anywhere. In the front yard was a clump of tall pines, the rough brown trunks wet, the green branches, dark and shining, heavy with rain, the ground underneath mournfully sodden and black.

The pasture on the other side. The green grass, lush, wet and cold, and the outcroppings of limestone that held little pools of rain water in all the tiny holes. Beyond, the low hills gloomy with timber against the lowering sky.

They slid out onto the main road. They bumped over the small wooden bridge above the swollen creek that came from the pasture. Daisy looked down. She saw the little swirls of foam, the long grass that swished with the water, the old rusted tin cans lodged between the rocks.

She sat up straight and important, her thin, homely little face strained with excitement, her sharp eyes taking in everything. The watery mud holes in the road, the little thickets of plum trees, low and wet, in dark interlacings. She held on fiercely, but made no sound when the car skidded.

She felt the grandeur of having a ride. One wet Sunday, Mr. Brooker had driven them all home from church, she and Goldie and Dwight packed tightly into the back seat of the car, shut in by the side curtains, against which the rain lashed, catching the muddy scent of the roads. Sometimes they could plan to go to town just when Mr.

Pattey was going to work in his Ford. Then they would run out and shout eagerly, "Mr. Pattey! Are you going through town?" Sometimes he didn't hear them. Sometimes he said, with curt good nature, "Well, pile in"; and they all hopped into the truck back. "He says we can go along with him."

She looked at the black wet fields through which little leaves of bright green corn grew in rows, at showery bushes of sumach along the roadside. A gasoline engine pumping water made a loud desolate sound. There were somber-looking cattle in the wet grass, and lonely, thick-foliaged trees growing here and there in the pastures. She felt her telescope on the floor of the car, the box of groceries beside her. She eyed these with a sharp curiosity. There was a fresh pineapple—something the Switzers didn't often get at home. She wondered if Edna would have it for dinner. Maybe she could hint a little to Edna.

She was out in the country. She could no longer see her house even if she wanted to—standing dingy, streaked with rain, in its rough grass on the little hill. A lump came into her throat. She had looked forward to playing with Edna's children. But Goldie and Dwight would play all morning without her. She was still proud of being the oldest, of going out with Elmer and Edna; but now there was a forlornness in the pride.

She wished she were in the front seat with Elmer. She didn't see why he hadn't put her there. She would have liked to know who all the people were who lived on these farms; how old Elmer's babies were; and if he and Edna always went to the movies when they went into town on Saturday nights. Elmer must have lots of money to buy a car like this. He had a new house on his farm, too, and Mrs. Metzinger had said that it had plumbing. Maybe they would take her to the movies, too. She might hint about that.

When she had gone to visit Uncle Fred, she had had to go on the train. She liked this better. She hoped they had a long way to go. She called out to Elmer:

"Say, how much farther is your place?"

"What's that?" He turned around. "Oh, just down the road a ways. Scared to drive in the mud?"

"No, I ain't scared. I like to drive most any way."

She looked at Elmer's back, the old felt hat crammed down carelessly on his head, the back of his neck with the golden hair on the sunburned skin above the blue of his shirt collar. Strong and easy and slouched a little over the steering wheel that he handled so masterly. Elmer and Edna were just young folks; but Mrs. Metzinger said that they had more to start with than most young farmers did, and that they were hustlers. Daisy felt that the pride of this belonged to her too, now.

"Here we are!"

"Oh, is this where you folks live?" Daisy cried eagerly.

The house stood back from the road, beyond a space of bare yard with a little scattering of grass just starting —small, modern, painted a bright new white and yellow. The barn was new too, a big splendid barn of frescoed brick, with a silo of the same. There were no trees. A raw desolate wind blew across the back yard as they drove up beside the back door.

Edna had come out on the step. Elmer grinned at her as he took out the box of groceries, and she slightly raised her eyebrows. She said kindly enough:

"Well, you brought Daisy. Hello, Daisy, are you going to stay with us this summer?"

"I guess so," Daisy said importantly. But she suddenly felt a little shy and forlorn as she got out of the car and stood on the bare ground in the chilly wind.

"Yes, I brought her along," Elmer said.

"Are the roads very bad?"

"Kind of bad. Why?"

"Well, I'd like to get over to mama's some time today."

"Oh, I guess they aren't too bad for that."

Daisy pricked up her sharp little ears. Another ride. That cheered her.

"Look in the door," Edna said in a low fond voice, motioning with her head.

Two little round, blond heads were pressed tightly against the screen door. There was a clamor of "Daddy, daddy!" Elmer grinned with a half bashful pride as he stood with the box of groceries, raising his eyebrows with mock surprise and demanding, "Who's this? What you shoutin' 'daddy' for? You don't think daddy's got anything for you, do you?" He and Edna were going into the kitchen together, until Edna remembered and called back hastily:

"Oh, come in, Daisy!"

Daisy stood, a little left out and solitary, there in the kitchen, as Billy, the older of the babies, climbed frantically over Elmer, demanding candy, and the little one toddled smilingly about. Her eyes took in all of it. She was impressed by the shining blue-and-white linoleum, the range with its nickel and enamel, the bright new woodwork. Edna was laughing and scolding at Elmer and the baby. Billy had made his father produce the candy. Daisy's sharp little eyes looked hungrily at the lemon drops until Edna remembered her.

"Give Daisy a piece of your candy," she said.

He would not go up to Daisy. She had to come forward and take one of the lemon drops herself. She saw where Edna put the sack, in a dish high in the cupboard. She hoped they would get some more before long.

"My telescope's out there in the car," she reminded them.

"Oh! Elmer, you go and get it and take it up for her," Edna said.

"What?"

"Her valise—or whatever it is—out in the car."

"Oh, sure," Elmer said with a cheerful grin.

"It's kind of an old telescope," Daisy said conversationally. "I guess it's been used a lot. My papa used to have it. The strap broke when mama was fastening it this morning. We ain't got any suitcase. I had to take this because it was all there was in the house, and mama didn't want to get me a new one."

Edna raised her eyebrows politely. She leaned over and pretended to spat the baby as he came toddling up to her, then rubbed her cheek against his round head with its funny fuzz of hair.

Daisy watched solemnly. "I didn't know both of your children was boys. I thought one of 'em was a girl. That's what there is at home now—one boy and one girl."

"Um-hm," Edna replied absently. "You can go up with Elmer and take off your things, Daisy," she said. "You can stop and unpack your valise now, I guess, if you'd like to. Then you can come down and help me in the kitchen. You know we got you to help me," she reminded.

Daisy, subdued, followed Elmer up the bright new stairs. In the upper hall, two strips of very clean rag rug were laid over the shining yellow of the floor. Elmer had put her telescope in one of the bedrooms.

"There you are!"

She heard him go clattering down the stairs, and then a kind of murmuring and laughing in the kitchen. The back door slammed. She hurried to the window in time to see Elmer go striding off toward the barn.

She looked about her room with intense curiosity. It too had a bright varnished floor. She had a bed all of her own—a small, old-fashioned bed, left from some old furnishings, that had been put in this room that had the pipes and the hot water tank. She had to see everything,

but she had a stealthy look as she tiptoed about, started to open the drawers of the dresser, looked out of her window. She put her coat and hat on the bed. She would rather be down in the kitchen with Edna than unpack her telescope now.

She guessed she would go down where the rest of them were.

III

Elmer came into the house for dinner. He brought in a cold, muddy, outdoor breath with him. The range was going, but the bright little kitchen seemed chilly, with the white oilcloth on the table, the baby's varnished high chair and his little fat, mottled hands.

Edna made a significant little face at Elmer. Daisy did not see. She was standing back from the stove, where Edna was at work, looking at the baby.

"He can talk pretty good, can't he? Dwight couldn't say anything but 'mama' when he was that little."

Edna's back was turned. She said meaningly:

"Now, Elmer's come in for dinner, Daisy, we'll have to hurry. You must help me get on the dinner. You can cut bread and get things on the table. You must help, you know. That's what you are supposed to do."

Daisy looked startled, a little scared and resentful. "Well, I don't know where you keep your bread."

"Don't you remember where I told you to put it this morning? Right over in the cabinet, in that big box. You must watch, Daisy, and learn where things are."

Elmer, a little embarrassed at the look that Edna gave him, whistled as he began to wash his hands at the sink.

"How's daddy's old boy?" he said loudly, giving a poke at the baby's chin.

As Edna passed him, she shook her head and her lips just formed, "Been like that all morning!"

He grinned comprehendingly. Then both their faces became expressionless.

Daisy had not exactly heard, but she looked from one to the other, silent and dimly wondering. The queer ache that had kept starting all through the morning, under her interest in Edna's things and doings, came over her again. She sensed something different in the atmosphere than she had ever known before—some queer difference between the position of herself and of the two babies, a faint notion of what mama had meant when she had said that this would not be visiting.

"I guess I'm going to have the toothache again," she said faintly.

No one seemed to hear her.

Edna whisked off the potatoes, drained the water. . . . "You might bring me a dish, Daisy." Daisy searched a long time while Edna turned impatiently and pointed. Edna put the rest of the things on the table herself. Her young, fresh, capable mouth was tightly closed, and she was making certain resolutions.

Daisy stood hesitating in the middle of the room, a scrawny, unappealing little figure. Billy—fat, blond, in funny, dark blue union-alls—was trotting busily about the kitchen. Daisy swooped down upon him and tried to bring him to the table. He set up a howl. Edna turned, looked astonished, severe.

"I was trying to make him come to the table," Daisy explained weakly.

"You scared him. He isn't used to you. He doesn't like it. Don't cry, Billy. The girl didn't mean anything."

"Here, daddy'll put him in his place," Elmer said hastily.

Billy looked over his father's shoulder at Daisy with suffused, resentful blue eyes. She did not understand it,

and felt strangely at a loss. She had been left with Goldie and Dwight so often. She had always made Dwight go to the table. She had been the boss.

Edna said in a cool, held-in voice, "Put these things on the table, Daisy."

They sat down. Daisy and the other children had always felt it a great treat to eat away from home instead of at their own scanty, hastily set table. They had hung around Mrs. Metzinger's house at noon, hoping to be asked to stay, not offended when told that "it was time for them to run off now." Her pinched little face had a hungry look as she stared at the potatoes and fried ham and pie. But they did not watch and urge her to have more, as Mrs. Metzinger did, and Mrs. Brooker when she took pity on the Switzers and had them there. Daisy wanted more pie. But none of them seemed to be taking more, and so she said nothing. She remembered what her mother had said, with now a faint comprehension. "You must remember you're out working for other folks, and it won't be like it is at home."

After dinner, Edna said, "Now you can wash the dishes, Daisy."

She went into the next room with the children. Daisy, as she went hesitatingly about the kitchen alone, could hear Edna's low contented humming as she sat in there rocking, the baby in her lap. The bright kitchen was empty and lonely now. Through the window, Daisy could see the great barn looming up against the rainy sky. She hoped that they would drive to Edna's mother's soon.

She finished as soon as she could and went into the dining room where Edna was sewing on the baby's rompers. Edna went on sewing. Daisy sat down disconsolately. That queer low ache went all through her. She said in a small dismal voice:

"I guess I got the toothache again."

Edna bit off a thread.

"I had it awful hard awhile ago. Mama come pretty near taking me to the dentist."

"That's too bad," Edna murmured politely. But she offered no other condolence. She gave a little secret smile at the baby asleep on a blanket and a pillow in one corner of the shiny leather davenport.

"Is Elmer going to drive into town to-morrow?"

"To-morrow? I don't suppose so."

"Mama couldn't find the belt of my plaid dress and I thought if he was, maybe I could go along and get it. I'd like to have it."

Daisy's homely mouth drooped at the corners. Her toothache did not seem to matter to anyone. Edna did not seem to want to see that anything was wrong with her. She had expected Edna to be concerned, to mention remedies. But it wasn't toothache, that strange lonesome ache all over her. Maybe she was going to be terribly sick. Mama wouldn't come home for supper to be told about it.

She saw mama's face as in that last glimpse of it—drawn with crying, and yet trying to smile, under the old cleaning cap, her hand holding her coat together. . . .

Edna glanced quickly at her. The child was so mortally unattractive, unappealing even in her forlornness. Edna frowned a little, but said kindly:

"Now you might take Billy into the kitchen out of my way, Daisy, and amuse him."

"Well, he cries when I pick him up," Daisy said faintly.

"He won't cry this time. Take him out and help him play with his blocks. You must help me with the children, you know."

"Well, if he'll go with me."

"He'll go with you, won't he, Billy boy? Won't you go with Daisy, sweetheart?"

Billy stared and then nodded. Daisy felt a thrill of comfort as Billy put his little fat hand in hers and trotted

into the kitchen beside her. He had the fattest hands, she thought. Edna brought the blocks and put the box down on the floor beside Daisy.

"Now, see if you can amuse him so that I can get my sewing done."

"Shall you and me play blocks, Billy?" Daisy murmured.

He nodded. Then he got hold of the box with one hand, tipped out all the blocks on the floor with a bang and a rattle, and looked at her with a pleased proud smile.

"Oh no, Billy. You mustn't spill out the blocks. Look, you're too little to play with them. No, now—now wait! Let Daisy show you. Daisy'll build you something real nice—shall she?"

He gave a solemn nod of consent.

Daisy set out the blocks on the bright linoleum. She had never had such blocks as these to handle before. Dwight's were only a few old, unmatched, broken ones. Her spirit of leadership came back, and she firmly put away that fat hand of Billy's whenever he meddled with her building. She could make something really wonderful with these blocks.

"No, Billy, you mustn't. See, when Daisy's got it all done, then you can see what the lovely building is."

She put the blocks together with great interest. She knew what she was going to make—it was going to be a new house; no, a new church. Just as she got the walls up, in came that little hand again, and then with a delighted grunt Billy swept the blocks pell-mell about the floor. At the clatter, he sat back, pursing his mouth to give an ecstatic "Ooh!"

"Oh, Billy—you mustn't, the building wasn't done! Look, you've spoiled it. Now you've got to sit 'way off here while I try to build it over again."

Billy's look of triumph turned to surprise and then to vociferous protest as Daisy picked him up and firmly

transplanted him to another corner of the room. He set up a tremendous howl. He had never been set aside like that before. Edna came hurrying out. Daisy looked at Edna for justification, but instinctively on the defensive.

"Billy knocked over the blocks. He spoiled the building."

"Wah! Wah!" Billy gave loud heartbroken sobs. The tears ran down his fat cheeks and he held out his arms piteously toward his mother.

"I didn't hurt him," Daisy said, scared.

"Never mind, lover," Edna was crooning. "Of course he can play with his blocks. They're Billy's blocks, Daisy," she said. "He doesn't like to sit and see you put up buildings. He wants to play, too. See, you've made him cry now."

"Do' wanna stay here," Billy wailed.

"Well, come in with mother then." She picked him up, wiping his tears.

"I didn't hurt him," Daisy protested.

"Well, never mind now. You can pick up the blocks and then sweep up the floor, Daisy. You didn't do that when you finished the dishes. Never mind," she was saying to Billy. "Pretty soon daddy'll come in and we'll have a nice ride."

Daisy soberly picked up the blocks and got the broom. What had she done to Billy? He had tried to spoil her building. She always made Dwight keep back until she had finished. Of course it was Daisy, the oldest, who should lead and manage. There had been no one to hear her side. Everything was different. She winked back tears as she swept, poorly and carelessly.

Then she brightened up as Elmer came tramping up on the back porch and then through the kitchen.

"Edna!"

"She's in there," Daisy offered.

"Want to go now? What! Is the baby asleep?" he asked blankly.

Edna gave him a warning look and the door was closed.

Daisy listened hard. She swept very softly. She could catch only a little of what they said—"Kind of hate to go off . . . I know, but if we once start . . . not a thing all day . . . what we got her for . . ." She had no real comprehension of it. She hurried and put away the broom. She wanted to be sure and be ready to go.

Elmer tramped out, straight past her. She saw from the window that he was backing the car out from the shed. She could hear Edna and Billy upstairs, could hear the baby cry a little as he was wakened. Maybe she ought to go out and get on her wraps, too.

Elmer honked the horn. A moment later Edna came hurrying downstairs, in her hat and coat, and Billy in a knitted cap and a red sweater crammed over his union-alls, so that he looked like a little Brownie. The baby had on his little coat, too.

Edna called out, "Come in and get this boy, daddy." She did not look at Daisy, but said hurriedly, "We're going for a little ride, Daisy. Have you finished the sweeping? Well, then, you can pick up those pieces in the dining room. We won't be gone so very long. When it's a quarter past five, you start the fire, like I showed you this noon, and slice the potatoes that were left, and the meat. And set the table."

The horn was honked again.

"Yes! Well, we'll be back, Daisy. Come, lover, daddy's in a hurry."

Daisy stood looking after them. Billy clamored to sit beside his daddy. Edna took the baby from Elmer and put him beside her on the back seat. There was room—half of the big back seat. There wasn't anything, really, to be done at home. That was the worst of it. They just didn't want to take her. They all belonged together.

They didn't want to take anyone else along. She was an outsider. They all—even the baby—had a freshened look of expectancy.

The engine roared—they had started; slipping on the mud of the drive, then forging straight ahead, around the turn, out of sight.

IV

She went forlornly into the dining-room. The light from the windows was dim now in the rainy, late afternoon. The pink pieces from the baby's rompers were scattered over the gay rug. She got down on her hands and knees, slowly picking them up, sniffing a little. She heard the Big Ben clock in the kitchen ticking loudly.

That dreadful ache submerged her. No one would ask about it, no one would try to comfort her. Before, there had always been mama coming home, anxious, scolding sometimes, but worried over them if they didn't feel right, caring about them. Mama and Goldie and Dwight cared about her—but she was away out in the country, and they were at home. She didn't want to stay here, where she didn't belong. But mama had told her that she must begin helping this summer.

Her ugly little mouth contorted into a grimace of weeping. But silent weeping, without any tears; because she already had the cold knowledge that no one would notice or comfort it.

THE KILLERS[1]

Ernest Hemingway

The door of Henry's lunchroom opened and two men came in. They sat down at the counter.

"What's yours?" George asked them.

"I don't know," one of the men said. "What do you want to eat, Al?"

"I don't know," said Al. "I don't know what I want to eat."

Outside it was getting dark. The street light came on outside the window. The two men at the counter read the menu. From the other end of the counter Nick Adams watched them. He had been talking to George when they came in.

"I'll have a roast pork tenderloin with apple sauce and mashed potato," the first man said.

"It isn't ready yet."

"What the hell do you put it on the card for?"

"That's dinner," George explained. "You can get that at six o'clock."

George looked at the clock on the wall behind the counter.

"It's five o'clock."

"The clock says twenty minutes past five," the second man said.

"It's twenty minutes fast."

"Oh, to hell with the clock," the first man said. "What have you got to eat?"

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"I can give you any kind of sandwiches," George said. "You can have ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver and bacon, or a steak."

"Give me chicken croquettes with green peas and cream sauce and mashed potatoes."

"That's the dinner."

"Everything we want's the dinner, eh? That's the way you work it."

"I can give you ham and eggs, bacon and eggs, liver——"

"I'll take ham and eggs," the man called Al said. He wore a derby hat and a black overcoat buttoned across the chest. His face was small and white and he had tight lips. He wore a silk muffler and gloves.

"Give me bacon and eggs," said the other man. He was about the same size as Al. Their faces were different, but they were dressed like twins. Both wore overcoats too tight for them. They sat leaning forward, their elbows on the counter.

"Got anything to drink?" Al asked.

"Silver beer, bevo, ginger ale," George said.

"I mean you got anything to drink?"

"Just those I said."

"This is a hot town," said the other. "What do they call it?"

"Summit."

"Ever hear of it?" Al asked his friend.

"No," said the friend.

"What do you do here nights?" Al asked.

"They eat the dinner," his friend said. "They all come here and eat the big dinner."

"That's right," George said.

"So you think that's right?" Al asked George.

"Sure."

"You're a pretty bright boy, aren't you?"

"Sure," said George.

"Well, you're not," said the other little man. "Is he, Al?"

"He's dumb," said Al. He turned to Nick. "What's your name?"

"Adams."

"Another bright boy," Al said. "Ain't he a bright boy, Max?"

"The town's full of bright boys," Max said.

George put the two platters, one of ham and eggs, the other of bacon and eggs, on the counter. He set down two side-dishes of fried potatoes and closed the wicket into the kitchen.

"Which is yours?" he asked Al.

"Don't you remember?"

"Ham and eggs."

"Just a bright boy," Max said. He leaned forward and took the ham and eggs. Both men ate with their gloves on. George watched them eat.

"What are you looking at?" Max looked at George.

"Nothing."

"The hell you were. You were looking at me."

"Maybe the boy meant it for a joke, Max," Al said.

George laughed.

"*You* don't have to laugh," Max said to him. "*You* don't have to laugh at all, see?"

"All right," said George.

"So he thinks it's all right." Max turned to Al. "He thinks it's all right. That's a good one."

"Oh, he's a thinker," Al said. They went on eating.

"What's the bright boy's name down the counter?" Al asked Max.

"Hey, bright boy," Max said to Nick. "You go around on the other side of the counter with your boy friend."

"What's the idea?" Nick asked.

"There isn't any idea."

"You better go around, bright boy," Al said. Nick went around behind the counter.

"What's the idea?" George asked.

"None of your damn' business," Al said. "Who's out in the kitchen?"

"The nigger."

"What do you mean the nigger?"

"The nigger that cooks."

"Tell him to come in."

"What's the idea?"

"Tell him to come in."

"Where do you think you are?"

"We know damn' well where we are," the man called Max said. "Do we look silly?"

"You talk silly," Al said to him. "What the hell do you argue with this kid for? Listen," he said to George, "tell the nigger to come out here."

"What are you going to do to him?"

"Nothing. Use your head, bright boy. What would we do to a nigger?"

George opened the slit that opened back into the kitchen. "Sam," he called. "Come in here a minute."

The door to the kitchen opened and the nigger came in. "What was it?" he asked. The two men at the counter took a look at him.

"All right, nigger. You stand right there," Al said.

Sam, the nigger, standing in his apron, looked at the two men sitting at the counter. "Yes, sir," he said. Al got down from his stool.

"I'm going back to the kitchen with the nigger and bright boy," he said. "Go on back to the kitchen, nigger. You go with him, bright boy." The little man walked after Nick and Sam, the cook, back into the kitchen. The door shut after them. The man called Max sat at the counter opposite George. He didn't look at George but looked in the mirror that ran along back of the counter.

Henry's had been made over from a saloon into a lunch counter.

"Well, bright boy," Max said, looking into the mirror, "why don't you say something?"

"What's it all about?"

"Hey, Al," Max called, "bright boy wants to know what it's all about."

"Why don't you tell him?" Al's voice came from the kitchen.

"What do you think it's all about?"

"I don't know."

"What do you think?"

Max looked into the mirror all the time he was talking.

"I wouldn't say."

"Hey, Al, bright boy says he wouldn't say what he thinks it's all about."

"I can hear you all right," Al said from the kitchen. He had propped open the slit that dishes passed through into the kitchen with a catsup bottle. "Listen, bright boy," he said from the kitchen to George. "Stand a little further along the bar. You move a little to the left, Max." He was like a photographer arranging for a group picture.

"Talk to me, bright boy," Max said. "What do you think's going to happen?"

George did not say anything.

"I'll tell you," Max said. "We're going to kill a Swede. Do you know a big Swede named Ole Andreson?"

"Yes."

"He comes here to eat every night, don't he?"

"Sometimes he comes here."

"He comes here at six o'clock, don't he?"

"If he comes."

"We know all that, bright boy," Max said. "Talk about something else. Ever go to the movies?"

"Once in a while."

"You ought to go to the movies more. The movies are fine for a bright boy like you."

"What are you going to kill Ole Andreson for? What did he ever do to you?"

"He never had a chance to do anything to us. He never even seen us."

"And he's only going to see us once," Al said from the kitchen.

"What are you going to kill him for, then?" George asked.

"We're killing him for a friend. Just to oblige a friend, bright boy."

"Shut up," said Al from the kitchen. "You talk too goddam much."

"Well, I got to keep bright boy amused. Don't I, bright boy?"

"You talk too damn' much," Al said. "The nigger and my bright boy are amused by themselves. I got them tied up like a couple of girl friends in the convent."

"I suppose you were in a convent."

"You never know."

"You were in a kosher convent. That's where you were."

George looked up at the clock.

"If anybody comes in you tell them the cook is off, and if they keep after it, you tell them you'll go back and cook yourself. Do you get that, bright boy?"

"All right," George said. "What you going to do with us afterward?"

"That'll depend," Max said. "That's one of those things you never know at the time."

George looked up at the clock. It was a quarter past six. The door from the street opened. A street car motorman came in.

"Hello, George," he said. "Can I get supper?"

"Sam's gone out," George said. "He'll be back in about half an hour."

"I'd better go up the street," the motorman said. George looked at the clock. It was twenty minutes past six.

"That was nice, bright boy," Max said. "You're a regular little gentleman."

"He knew I'd blow his head off," Al said from the kitchen.

"No," said Max. "It ain't that. Bright boy is nice. He's a nice boy. I like him."

At six-fifty-five George said: "He's not coming."

Two other people had been in the lunchroom. Once George had gone out to the kitchen and made a ham-and-egg sandwich "to go" that a man wanted to take with him. Inside the kitchen he saw Al, his derby hat tipped back, sitting on a stool beside the wicket with the muzzle of a sawed-off shotgun resting on the ledge. Nick and the cook were back to back in the corner, a towel tied in each of their mouths. George had cooked the sandwich, wrapped it up in oiled paper, put it in a bag, brought it in, and the man had paid for it and gone out.

"Bright boy can do everything," Max said. "He can cook and everything. You'd make some girl a nice wife, bright boy."

"Yes," George said. "Your friend, Ole Andreson, isn't going to come."

"We'll give him ten minutes," Max said.

Max watched the mirror and the clock. The hands of the clock marked seven o'clock, and then five minutes past seven.

"Come on, Al," said Max. "We better go. He's not coming."

"Better give him five minutes," Al said from the kitchen.

In the five minutes a man came in, and George explained that the cook was sick.

"Why the hell don't you get another cook?" the man asked. "Aren't you running a lunch-counter?" He went out.

"Come on, Al," Max said.

"What about the two bright boys and the nigger?"

"They're all right."

"You think so?"

"Sure. We're through with it."

"I don't like it," said Al. "It's sloppy. You talk too much."

"Oh, what the hell," said Max. "We got to keep amused, haven't we?"

"You talk too much, all the same," Al said. He came out from the kitchen. The cut-off barrels of the shotgun made a slight bulge under the waist of his too tight-fitting overcoat. He straightened his coat with his gloved hands.

"So long, bright boy," he said to George. "You got a lot of luck."

"That's the truth," Max said. "You ought to play the races, bright boy."

The two of them went out the door. George watched them through the window pass under the arc-light and cross the street. In their tight overcoats and derby hats they looked like a vaudeville team. George went back through the swinging door into the kitchen and untied Nick and the cook.

"I don't want any more of that," said Sam, the cook. "I don't want any more of that."

Nick stood up. He had never had a towel in his mouth before.

"Say," he said. "What the hell?" He was trying to swagger it off.

"They were going to kill Ole Andreson," George said. "They were going to shoot him when he came in to eat."

"Ole Andreson?"

"Sure."

The cook felt of the corners of his mouth with his thumbs.

"They all gone?" he asked.

"Yeah," said George. "They're gone now."

"I don't like it," said the cook. "I don't like any of it at all."

"Listen," George said to Nick. "You better go see Ole Andreson."

"All right."

"You better not have anything to do with it at all," Sam, the cook, said. "You better stay away out of it."

"Don't go if you don't want to," George said.

"Mixing up in this ain't going to get you anywhere," the cook said. "You stay out of it."

"I'll go see him," Nick said to George. "Where does he live?"

The cook turned away.

"Little boys always know what they want to do," he said.

"He lives up at Hirsch's rooming-house," George said to Nick.

"I'll go up there."

Outside the arc-light shone through the bare branches of a tree. Nick walked up the street beside the car-tracks and turned at the next arc-light down a side street. Three houses up the street was Hirsch's rooming-house. Nick walked up the two steps and pushed the bell. A woman came to the door.

"Is Ole Andreson here?"

"Do you want to see him?"

"Yes, if he's in."

Nick followed the woman up a flight of stairs and back to the end of a corridor. She knocked on the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's somebody to see you, Mr. Andreson," the woman said.

"It's Nick Adams."

"Come in."

Nick opened the door and went into the room. Ole Andreson was lying on the bed with all his clothes on. He had been a heavyweight prizefighter and he was too long for the bed. He lay with his head on two pillows. He did not look at Nick.

"What was it?" he asked.

"I was up at Henry's," Nick said, "and two fellows came in and tied up me and the cook, and they said they were going to kill you."

It sounded silly when he said it. Ole Andreson said nothing.

"They put us out in the kitchen," Nick went on. "They were going to shoot you when you came in to supper."

Ole Andreson looked at the wall and did not say anything.

"George thought I better come and tell you about it."

"There isn't anything I can do about it," Ole Andreson said.

"I'll tell you what they were like."

"I don't want to know what they were like," Ole Andreson said. He looked at the wall. "Thanks for coming to tell me about it."

"That's all right."

Nick looked at the big man lying on the bed.

"Don't you want me to go and see the police?"

"No," Ole Andreson said. "That wouldn't do any good."

"Isn't there something I could do?"

"No. There ain't anything to do."

"Maybe it was just a bluff."

"No. It ain't just a bluff."

Ole Andreson rolled over toward the wall.

"The only thing is," he said, talking toward the wall, "I just can't make up my mind to go out. I been in here all day."

"Couldn't you get out of town?"

"No," Ole Andreson said. "I'm through with all that running around."

He looked at the wall.

"There ain't anything to do now."

"Couldn't you fix it up some way?"

"No. I got in wrong." He talked in the same flat voice. "There ain't anything to do. After a while I'll make up my mind to go out."

"I better go back and see George," Nick said.

"So long," said Ole Andreson. He did not look toward Nick. "Thanks for coming around."

Nick went out. As he shut the door he saw Ole Andreson with all his clothes on, lying on the bed looking at the wall.

"He's been in his room all day," the landlady said downstairs. "I guess he don't feel well. I said to him: 'Mr. Andreson, you ought to go out and take a walk on a nice fall day like this,' but he didn't feel like it."

"He doesn't want to go out."

"I'm sorry he don't feel well," the woman said. "He's an awfully nice man. He was in the ring, you know."

"I know it."

"You'd never know it except from the way his face is," the woman said. They stood talking just inside the street door. "He's just as gentle."

"Well, good-night, Mrs. Hirsch," Nick said.

"I'm not Mrs. Hirsch," the woman said. "She owns the place. I just look after it for her. I'm Mrs. Bell."

"Well, good-night, Mrs. Bell," Nick said.

"Good-night," the woman said.

Nick walked up the dark street to the corner under

the arc-light, and then along the car-tracks to Henry's eating-house. George was inside, back of the counter.

"Did you see Ole?"

"Yes," said Nick. "He's in his room and he won't go out."

The cook opened the door from the kitchen when he heard Nick's voice.

"I don't even listen to it," he said, and shut the door.

"Did you tell him about it?" George asked.

"Sure. I told him but he knows what it's all about."

"What's he going to do?"

"Nothing."

"They'll kill him."

"I guess they will."

"He must have got mixed up in something in Chicago."

"I guess so," said Nick.

"It's a hell of a thing."

"It's an awful thing," Nick said.

They did not say anything. George reached down for a towel and wiped the counter.

"I wonder what he did?" Nick said.

"Double-crossed somebody. That's what they kill them for."

"I'm going to get out of this town," Nick said.

"Yes," said George. "That's a good thing to do."

"I can't stand to think about him waiting in the room and knowing he's going to get it. It's too damned awful."

"Well," said George, "you better not think about it."

THE PERSISTENT LITTLE FOOL[1]

FANNY KEMBLE JOHNSON

A WILD, soft rush as of some one sliding down the baluster-rail, a faint whir as of quail rising from green coverts, a presence not to be ignored in the doorway.

Hobson, taking his afternoon ease on the porch, threw Mrs. Roderick Ivor, his hostess, and third cousin on the mother's side, a glance of pained astonishment as he rose to greet her niece Bina, his fourth cousin, also on the mother's side.

"Why, this is a pleasant surprise, Bina," said Hobson gloomily. "I thought you wouldn't be here before August. You've grown a lot. I suppose you still think you want to be a trained nurse, hey?"

Bina was seventeen. She possessed to overflowing all the glow, the color, the music, of that incomparable age. She came forward and put out her hand with a touching mixture of womanly assurance and girlish timidity.

"How do you do, Cousin Hobson?" said Bina, with the utmost propriety.

Hobson proffered his nice, comfortable chair to Bina. He seemed about to cry. He was reflecting on the fact that he, a poor, city-distracted genealogist, had come to Cedarcliff hoping to find there peace and quiet wherein to complete his great work, "The Harrison Family."

"Pen's crazy to see you, Bina," it came to him to say; "I believe he's down by the creek hunting you up."

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"Oh," cried Bina, eagerly, "did you bring little Pen with you, Cousin Hob?"

She turned her face, brimming with color and light, on them for a brief moment as she ran down the steps. Her smooth hand shone rosy in the sunlight as she flung it up to hail Cousin Hob's little boy.

He came tearing, almost as vivid a thing as Bina herself, all red cheeks, bronze curls, and naked brown legs and arms. Hobson and Kathy watched him embracing Bina with rapture, two creatures of deeper kin than that created by simple family ties. After a long moment of suspense for Hobson, little Pen drew Bina toward the creek. She threw them a longing glance as she went. She loved to talk with Cousin Hobson; but how sweetly she went to play with Cousin Hobson's little boy instead!

Hobson grinned, and sank back in his nice, comfortable chair with a sigh of relief mingled with apprehension.

"I'll have your writing things taken to the office," said Bina's thoughtful Aunt Kathy.

"What good would that do?" asked Hobson. Still, he considered the suggestion, and said presently, "Well—suppose you do, Kath."

Kathy said soothingly:

"Poor old Hob! But never mind; she won't be here next summer to upset you."

Hobson sat erect.

"Do you mean that her mother has consented to let that child enter a hospital?"

Kathy nodded.

"An innocent child—it's indecent. It shouldn't be allowed."

"Oh, goodness, Hobson!" cried Kathy.

"May I come in?" asked Bina next morning.

Hobson, from his place at Ivor's desk in the ancient, octagonal brick office near the creek, blinked up at the

peeping brightness that was Bina's face; then he leaned back and removed his eye-glasses.

"Have you got me in the book?" asked Bina, advancing joyously.

"Could I keep you out of it?" asked Cousin Hobson, with the deadliest pessimism.

"Oh, do show me!" cried Bina. "Do let me see, Cousin Hob!"

With an ill-considered and desperate gesture he snatched pages and pages of his precious "Harrison Family" (his mother had been a Miss Harrison) out of Bina's grasp. She stood still. The suns clouded over in her gray eyes; her eager hands dropped dead; her color stormed.

Hobson felt like the meanest man he had ever heard of. He pretended to be searching among the sheets he had rescued.

"Here you are," he said, affecting heartiness. "*You* come in here."

With precision and lucidity he explained the position of the tiny, fluttering leaf which represented Bina on the wide-spreading Harrison family tree.

He was effusively kind, to make up for having been a brute. Bina immediately came on in and settled herself among the vine shadows flecking the window-seat.

Past eleven, too late to be of any real assistance, his young cousin, Roderick Ivor, Jr., wandered by with his new setter pup, and, in response to an imploring glance from Hobson, invited Bina to come and play with the pup. Hobson looked after them as he settled the glasses back on his fine Roman nose.

"Persistent little fool!" he said. He bent to salvage the wreck of his morning.

Scarcely waiting to get Bina outside the office, Roddy asked in a matter-of-fact tone:

"Why don't you let old Hob alone?"

"But I love to talk to persons older than myself," said Bina. "All my best friends are older than myself. My very best girl friend is thirty-six years old."

"I wouldn't bother Hob too much, though," said Roddy, staring. "He came down here to be quiet, you know, and finish his genealogy."

Roddy's tone evinced that respect for literature, as applied to family history, proper to his twenty years.

"Did you ever know," asked Bina, not appearing to hear a word Roddy said, "that we had a doctor in our family, oh, about two hundred years ago, who kept a private graveyard for his patients?"

"Hob's stringing you."

"He's not. He showed it to me in the book. It was really all right. Persons came to him in their carriages from a hundred miles around. And when they died, as of course some of them did, he just used to bury them in his graveyard to save their families a whole lot of trouble. You can see for yourself that it would, Roddy —in those days."

"All I say is," said Roddy, "that, relative or no relative, no doctor with a private graveyard could ever have had *my* patronage."

Bina continued enthusiastically:

"And we had another doctor, an awfully young one, who cut off a man's leg when there wasn't the least need of it just because he was perfectly crazy to try a fine set of instruments he'd won for a prize. He told the man about it a long time afterward, and they both thought it a great joke."

"I hope," said Roddy, in his best elder-brother manner, "that *you* didn't think it a great joke, Bina?"

"No—just a l-little one," murmured Bina, with a deprecating, sidewise glance. She struggled with laughter.

"Bina," said Roddy —twin elder brothers could not have said it more gravely or affectionately —"you are a

splendid girl, but you are too flippant about serious things. I don't like it in you." He stooped, picking up a stick and throwing it for the puppy to bring.

Bina appeared rebuffed. They walked along in silence. Presently Roddy looked at her. She met the look with an eager, wistful smile.

"But I've no business preaching to you," said Roddy, coloring a bit. "It's just because you *are* splendid, and I think the world of you, that I've got the nerve to do it." He added, sniffing, "Smells good, doesn't it?"

Delectable odors were floating toward them from the kitchen, where Miss Lizzie, the housekeeper at Cedarcliff these twenty years, sampled a kettle of blackberry jam. Roddy's sister Mary sat in a stately pose on a flour barrel and stirred and stirred. The sunshine spilled brilliantly on the brass rim of the big kettle and along the freshly scoured white boards of the floor. On a napkin in the window-seat reposed a fresh baking of salt-rising bread.

"No, you don't, darling!" said Roddy. He whisked off the second napkin, which Miss Lizzie was carelessly casting over her baking, and glanced around. "Where's some butter?"

"Don't be such a kid, Roddy!" said Mary. "That bread is for to-morrow."

"*And* jam," said Roddy.

"*I* wouldn't humor them that way, Miss Lizzie," said Mary.

"There, Honey," said Miss Lizzie to Roddy.

"And do go away with it," said Mary, "before you get crumbs all over the floor."

"Murry," said Roddy, "you are getting to be a regular Miss Prim."

"I'd rather be a Miss Prim than a baby," said Mary. She said it with an eye on Bina, who stood munching bread and jam and gazing with absent-minded rapture into the

bubbling depths of the kettle. Tiny dark-red craters appeared and disappeared fascinatingly as Mary's stirrer advanced and receded. Faint red reflections glowed and faded. The beautiful odor grew so thick you could have sliced it.

"Let me stir!" begged Bina suddenly.

Mary pretended not to hear.

Bina's warm, insinuating hand curled gently just above Mary's on the long handle of the stirrer.

"Please, Bina!" said Mary coldly. She, too, glanced imploringly at Roddy; but Mary was not a distracted visiting genealogist. With a wicked grin, Roddy walked off.

"I wish you wouldn't persist, Bina," said Mary, still more coldly.

"What harm can the child do?" asked Kathy, strolling through on her way in from a morning walk.

There it was again, thought Mary, looking after her vanishing mother. Bina didn't act in the least like company; but if you didn't treat her like company, older persons took that tone with you.

While she thought thus, her hold on the handle involuntarily relaxed, and it was delivered into Bina's hands.

Bina invented a childish dance for herself as she retreated and advanced with the stirrer. She hummed an air to do the dance by.

"If you *will* stir, Bina," said Mary, "get up on the barrel and stir properly."

Bina obediently clambered up on the barrel.

"It's getting thick now," said Mary. "If you stop stirring for a moment it's liable to burn."

"Murry," called Roddy from the yard, "Geoff wants you on the 'phone."

Mary blushed slowly and with dignity.

"Run along, Mistress Mary," sang Bina.

Miss Lizzie had gone down into the cellar to look up

jars, and Mary hated to leave Bina alone with the jam. She moved reluctantly toward the door, looking back the while.

"Bina," she began.

"Murry," mocked Bina.

"All the same," warned Mary, "don't you let anything happen to my jam, Bina Harrison."

Mary was gone for a considerable time. As she hung up the receiver she was aware of a faintly different smell in the air. She stalked to the kitchen, scorning to hurry; besides, the mischief was done.

Bina looked up at Mary like a scared little girl as she stood her ground to be scolded.

"You *would* be a persistent little fool, Bina," said Mary. There was that in her tone which sent Bina shivering out into the July sunshine.

Later Roddy came on Bina moping in the old schoolroom in the yard. She leaned her elbows on a scarred deal table, and gazed disconsolately on the cracked and peeling globe which still had place there.

"Oh," said Roddy, "does the world look *that* bad to her?"

He pushed away the globe, sat on the table edge, and patted her shoulder.

"How did it happen?" he asked in a comforting tone.

"I got to thinking out a patent stirrer," confessed Bina unhappily; "one you could wind up, and set going while you read. And I guess I must have stopped stirring—for just a minute."

Roddy's head went back. His empty masculine mirth echoed to Mary, very hot just then as she scraped the kettle. What made the whole thing the more inexcusable was that the jam was not really badly burned; just enough to spoil it, that was all. Some persons would have poured it into jars all the same. Mary thanked Heaven she was

not one of these. Irked by Roddy's continuing laughter, she looked across the yard to the old school-room, and wondered how a girl could live seventeen years and a boy twenty and yet have as little common sense as Roddy and Bina.

"I see father down at the pasture," said Roddy. "Shall we go and have a look at June-bug, too?"

They strolled together to the pasture, where Bina leaned over a bar and made instant friends with June-bug, the little brown mare with the temper.

"I don't believe she's bad-tempered at all," said Bina. She swung herself up on the bar, and put out a coaxing hand. "*Are* you so wicked as all that, June-bug?" asked Bina caressingly.

June-bug appeared to shake her head. She came nearer and nibbled at Bina's pink fingers.

"*I* don't believe a word of it," said Bina to June-bug. She turned to Roderick Ivor, Sr.

"Oh, Uncle Rod, do let me ride her this evening. See, we've fallen in love with each other."

"Not safe for you," said Ivor. He smiled at her indulgently. Horsemanship was not Bina's chief accomplishment.

"Do you take my part, Roddy. See how she loves me."

"Bina," said Roddy, "in every situation of this sort there should always be at least one disinterested observer —for witness later on." Ivor and Roddy grinned at each other.

"Old Lil's safer for you," said Ivor.

"I'll tell you what, Uncle Rod," said Bina, not appearing to hear a word Ivor was saying. "Let's get her up to the house, and I'll ride her around the lawn. If she doesn't behave, I won't ask you again."

Ivor walked firmly forth from the inclosure.

Roddy watched him with interest, not yet ready to bet

on Bina. Ivor certainly looked very determined. Bina said nothing more. She merely slipped down from the bar, and hung on Uncle Rod's arm, and looked up at him. Bina's eyes were liquid. They pleaded as a baby's might plead for the moon and the eternal stars. And she only wanted to ride a pretty horse instead of an ugly one. It was a desire that seemed reasonable to Ivor, who would not have ridden old Lil himself for five hundred dollars. He looked at June-bug stretching her silken neck after the departing Bina. There they were, lovely feminine creatures imploring a favor.

"What about it, Roddy?" asked Ivor suddenly.

Roddy turned away to conceal a smile and get a bridle.

Mary and Kathy were on the porch as the small procession approached.

"Papa," cried Mary, incredulously, "you're not going to let *Bina* ride June-bug? Why, you wouldn't let *me* ride her yesterday."

"Well, they've taken a shine to each other," said Ivor placatingly.

Mary presented a severe girlish profile to her father as she walked into the house.

"Mary has entirely too pronounced a manner for so young a person," said he, reprovingly, to Mary's mother.

"Don't take it out on me," said that astonishingly young and pretty lady.

In the enigmatic silence which ensued Bina rode June-bug around the lawn several times with entire success.

A prettier picture than Bina on June-bug, with Roddy guarding at her stirrup, it would be hard to conceive. Ivor's face showed marked patriarchal pride in the girl, the boy, and the brown mare.

"That will do," he called to them presently, and Bina trotted up, glowing like a rose in full sunshine.

"Still," said Ivor, "I think I'll escort you myself this evening, Bina."

Over the red road through the green hills rode Bina and Ivor. To an observer from a point of vantage the July sun would have turned Ivor's white flannels into silver and Bina's gray habit to a rich purple, and have set both figures, on their little black shapes of horses, as sharply against the strange, scarlet effect of the road as if they had been but cut-out paper dolls. To such an observer it would have seemed odd and pretty to see them moving rapidly along through the many-shaded green of wood and field.

But to themselves Bina and Ivor appeared life-size, and each the center of a universe.

"Oh," exclaimed Bina, "do see those early black-eyed Susans!"

She whisked June-bug into a fence-corner, and half rose in her stirrup to get a better view of the creek-bank of black-eyed Susans.

"*Look* out!" shouted Ivor.

He wheeled his beautiful Bon away from June-bug's wicked newly shod little heels, but not quite in time.

Bina gazed dismayed at an ugly gash on Bon's ebony foreleg, from which blood was welling slowly. Ivor dismounted, and swore not altogether beneath his breath.

"It's back home for you, Bina," he said grimly.

Bon, out of pure malice, it seemed to Bina, presently began to limp. Ivor got off and led him. Bina drooped after. As they came up the lawn, Mary, at her window, took them in ironically.

Ivor jumped Bina to the ground and led Bon stableward. Bina followed unnoticed, and stood at the stable doorway watching Ivor as he tended the wound.

"I'm so sorry about it," she said.

"It was my fault," said Ivor, glancing up. "I'd no business trusting that little devil. Don't you bother, child."

She stepped forward, uttering a cry.

"It looks ugly, of course; but just so it doesn't leave a scar—run along, Bina."

He began winding a bandage in what seemed a fearfully fumbling way to the future trained nurse. Her fingers reached out of their own volition.

"Do let me do that for you, Uncle Roderick!" she pleaded passionately.

She had actually laid a hand on Bon's wincing foreleg when Ivor, pale with impatience, took her firmly by the shoulders and faced her toward the house.

"Bina," he said, "don't be a persistent little fool."

Bina was extremely subdued for several days. She wore a meek blue lawn dress with wide white Priscilla collar, and did crochet-work. One afternoon she sat on the porch steps with little Pen and Roddy. Little Pen blew at a blue balloon until his red-brown cheeks looked like the cheeks of a portly cherub. Bina listened dreamily to Cousin Polly Winston, who had driven over that morning, and who was conversing with Cousin Hobson on his favorite subject. Cousin Polly was a left-over in the refrigerator of Life. Life did not like to throw her away, but didn't in the least know what to do with her. Her parted hair was the neatest thing in the county, and her spine the straightest, and she considered every reference to reality to be unrefined, if not improper. She was precisely the person to be interesting to a genealogist, and Cousin Hob was having a good time.

"*She* comes in?" he asked in an excited tone.

"She was your Step-aunt Sarah's first cousin on her father's side; not your Step-aunt Sarah Dallas, Hobson, but your Step-aunt Sarah Aftonbury."

Hobson's face lighted. It seemed illuminating to him. But Roddy, though, as has been indicated, respecting his forebears, jumped up somewhat abruptly and strolled stableward. Bina felt deserted. She seized the blue bal-

loon, now expanded to unbelievable proportions, and tossed it after Roddy. Whirling about, he tossed it back. *Spang!* Bina sent it soaring, midnight blue against a pale-blue sky. It hovered among the branches of a young maple for a breathless moment before Roddy, with a beautiful leap into the air, had it back to Bina. The little blue dress, no longer meek, swirled about Bina as she ran out on the lawn with the blue balloon held high in air for a toss.

All this time the experienced little Pen was tugging at her skirts and shrieking:

"Give it back to me! You'll burst it. You hit it too hard. Oh, I want my balloon, Bina! You and Roddy will burst my balloon, Bina!"

Snap!

He stooped, weeping bitterly, and picked up a scrap of black rubber from the grass at Bina's feet. Bina swooped to him with open arms.

"Oh, Pen, I'm so sorry! I wouldn't have broken it for anything—not for *anything.*"

"You *would* play with it!" wailed Pen loudly. He pulled away from Bina.

Roddy grinned. Little Pen was only five. He did the best he could with his limited vocabulary; but, oh, how the poor child needed a word of three syllables just then!

"Stop that howling, son!" called the annoyed Hobson.

"Bina broke my balloon," shrilled little Pen.

"Well, what if she did?" said Hobson, heartlessly, and went on tossing his own apparently unexplodable old balloon for Cousin Polly's return. Little Pen subsided into low, but sustained, laments

"Stow it, Pen!" said Roddy. "I'll bring you a pocketful of balloons when I go to town Thursday."

The pocketful of balloons could not have seemed farther away to little Pen if Halley's Comet had promised to bring them the next time it came around. He flung

himself to the ground and sobbed in the most terrific hopelessness.

With a glance at Bina's stricken face, Roddy continued his interrupted progress stableward.

"Where you going?" asked Ivor, meeting him near the river-landing some fifteen minutes later.

Roddy looked funnily self-conscious.

"Oh, across," he said.

"Girl?" queried Ivor teasingly. He liked to see the big boy blush. But this time Roddy merely looked a bit annoyed. Then he smiled back.

"Yes," he said. Ivor reined in his horse for a moment that he might enjoy the splendid sight of Roddy riding on.

Roddy did not get back until after one.

"See here, you," Ivor hailed him from his room off the back porch—"you be in by twelve after this." His tone was sharp.

"Sorry, sir," said Roddy. "All right, sir." He came on in and talked a bit, to show that he wasn't sulky about being called down. When he continued upstairs he paused halfway down the hall and produced from his pocket a small packet, which he hung like a May-basket to Bina's door-knob.

He descended rather late next morning to find the breakfast-table deserted. Outside, Pen played gloriously with a scarlet balloon; within, Bina ran and hugged Roddy.

"You're choking me," said Roddy. "Do you suppose there are any hot biscuits in the kitchen, Bina?"

Mary glanced up from her sewing as Bina ran off to see.

"You spoil those children dreadfully, Roddy," said Mary. "I never heard of anything so ridiculous as riding twenty miles to buy a toy balloon."

"I didn't," said Roddy, imperturbably, "go to town to buy a toy balloon, Murry."

"May I ask what you did go for, then?" inquired Mary scornfully.

Kathy turned from where she arranged flowers by the bright window.

"Why, to buy happiness, of course," said Kathy, in a charming matter-of-fact tone. She threw Roddy a rose-bud, and he threw her back a kiss.

"What a pretty suit!" said Mary.

"Like it?" asked Roddy. He turned about and about.

"Better than any you ever had. I do wish the best-looking boy in the county wasn't my own brother."

"Piffle!" said Roddy, blushing violently.

The parlors were also in party trim. A crowd of youngsters was due for a dance. Geoff's call had already echoed across the ferry.

"Roddy's scrumptious," said Bina. She did the newest dance-step known in her far-away home town as she approached the two. "And so are you, Mary."

Mary gave her an indulgent smile, examining her appearance the while.

Bina held out her soft white skirts to show herself off the better. She was as brilliant as the rose-flushed moon of the poets emerging from silver river mists. All her edges were filmy ruffles.

"Run up and ask mama to fasten those folds on the shoulder with her pearl pin," said Mary. She added, being in a normal girlish humor over the dance, "You look good enough to eat, Bina."

"You look good enough to kiss," said Bina. She gave Mary a headlong embrace and ran upstairs.

"Shut the door, darling," said Kathy. "How sweet you are to-night!"

"Mary said to fasten these folds with your pearl pin, Aunt Kathy." As she spoke, Bina took up a trinket from

the dressing table and tried it against her folds, peeping around Kathy in the pier-glass. "How would this do?"

"The catch isn't good, I'm afraid," said Kathy.

It was a fine old cameo, a wedding gift to Kathy's mother, a delicious Hebe offering a vine-garlanded cup to an entrancing young god. Holding it to her shoulder, Bina turned her head sidewise. She looked the loveliest of little Greeks.

"It just suits," she yearned.

"I'd hate to have it lost," objected Kathy, seeking in vain for the pearl pin. "Where can it have got to?" she wondered. "Yes, that suits you, Bina—if only the catch were safe."

"Darling, sweet Aunt Kath, do let me wear it!" begged Bina, dancing out of the room. "I'll be so careful. I'll think of it every single minute." She called this last from the hall.

"Oh, well," said Kathy. She smiled vexedly, listening to Bina's soft downward rush.

It was an extremely young crowd. Toward midnight they thought it would be a lark to go down to the island and pretend to raid Roddy's melon-patch.

It must have been in the sand of the island that Bina lost Kathy's beautiful heirloom brooch.

At dawn Roddy and Bina went back and searched until breakfast-time, but Hebe and her god had apparently vanished away forever. After breakfast Kathy hunted with Roddy. She was particularly fond of that cameo for a dozen good reasons. When Kathy, too, gave it up and returned to the house, Bina watched for them, unseen in a porch corner.

"It's too bad," Roddy was saying as they slowly mounted the steps.

"It would never have happened," answered Kathy, almost vindictively, "if Bina had not been a persistent little fool." She went on in, not noticing that Bina was

there. But Roddy deflected his course toward the corner. Bina was hiding her eyes in the crook of her elbow and wetting her little pink gingham sleeve with bitter tears. Somehow she minded Aunt Kathy more than any one else.

"Everybody calls me that," said Bina gaspingly.

"*I* don't call you that," consoled Roddy.

"But you—*will,*" sobbed Bina. A tearing burst of tears ended speech on her part.

"You be in by sunset with your cousin," said Ivor to Roddy.

"Sure," said Roddy. He gave a final pull to the strap which fastened the lunch-basket to his saddle-bow and called, "Come along, Bina."

They rode off smartly. Morning rides were tremendously becoming to the two. They lighted Roddy up until he made one think of the line,

And Phœbus 'gins arise,

and they set Bina's rich hair rioting and her eyes shining with some special joy of life.

She halted her mare in the mountain creek, where it was wide and shallow and musical over many-toned stones.

"I feel good as an angel this morning," said Bina.

Roddy felt that way himself, only, being a boy, he wasn't so frank about it.

"But we mustn't loaf too long," he said, breaking the heavenly silence.

Hanging Rock was truly a place to go to see. The mountain came together as sharply as a shingle roof, with one edge overlapping a lot. Hanging Rock itself overlapped amazingly. You jumped to it across a narrow chasm, and had the thrill of risking your life every time you did it. But risking their lives at Hanging Rock was so old a story to the county people that they made nothing of it. Bina and Roddy sprang lightly over the chasm,

splashing up the water in the natural bird fountain hollowed out in the top of the rock by the ages and the ages, and poised carelessly where a misstep would have landed them a mile below on the top of a pine forest, and said how pretty the green-plaided landscape was, and pointed out to each other the houses they recognized—houses which looked near enough to be picked up and small enough to be carried home in Roddy's pocket.

Bina drew her deepest breath yet.

"Oh, Roddy, wouldn't you just love to live up here?"

"I'd just love to have something to eat," teased Roddy.

Roddy's watch had provokingly stopped, and they got started home a trifle late on that account. Bina continued as good as an angel until, one third of the way down, she insisted on exploring an unfamiliar road. She danced her impish little Dolly mare just ahead of Roddy's heavier mount. He reached forth a restraining hand, and Dolly broke into a lope. Now Dolly ran if she thought another horse was trying to catch up with her, and horsemanship was not Bina's strong point. Roddy was afraid to pursue. He followed in angry, sober-gaited silence. It is astonishing how time flies in these fooleries. When Bina tired of mocking at Roddy it really was late. The road had long since ended. It was not even a path now, or, rather, there were multitudinous paths stretching in every direction. A cloud-shadow menaced the forest. Faint thunders reverberated. Bina and Roddy gazed at each other.

"I've not the least idea where we are," said Roddy. He added coldly, "I hope it's not anywhere near the Drop."

To ride over the Drop would be not unlike riding off Hanging Rock. Bina gazed fearfully about her.

"I'd better lead the horses," said Roddy, peering into the darkening woods, trying to get the right direction. One might wander all night among those folded ridges

rippling along the backbone of the mountain. They wandered until ten o'clock or thereabout, Roddy guessed. It was pitch dark, a cloudy dark without stars, when he halted and looked back at the blur that was Bina on Dolly.

"We'll have to camp for the rest of the night," said Roddy. He said it with careful kindness of manner, but if he had known the truth about Bina he might not have been so considerate. Bina had always wanted to spend a night in the mountains under thrilling conditions. Despite her conscious guilt, she could not help humming happily as she helped gather twigs for a fire. When it blazed up, she sat by it and thought contentedly that it wouldn't be daylight for hours and hours. And she had all that time, with the romantic, leaf-embroidered darkness clasping them about, in which to have a confidential talk with Roddy. She meant to tell him of her ambitions, meant to listen to his. Perhaps he would even confide in her concerning the beautiful Miss Marye, who had treated him so badly the summer before; she had had hints here and there as she hovered on the edges of family conclaves. She glanced across the firelit space at Roddy, clasping his knees and staring off into the forest. It might have been a mere effect of light, but she had never before noticed how much alike Roddy and Mary really were.

"Roddy," she began timidly.

He gave a start.

"I'll tell you what," he said as Bina failed to follow up her opening, "I'll just pull together a lot of these dry leaves, and make you up a bed, Bina. You'll go to sleep in a jiffy in this air, and it will be morning before you know it."

Bina said not a word. She merely watched Roddy with a hopeless feeling. He heaped the leaves very neatly. Robins could not have arranged them in a more professional manner. Over the heap, which horridly suggested a woodland grave to Bina, he spread the gay saddle-

blankets. He then pulled off his coat and tossed it to her.

"Button that around you, Bina," he said in the tone of a conscientious nurse. "It gets cold toward morning."

There ensued half an hour of intense silence, bewildered on Bina's part. Roddy merely did not feel like talking, and was grateful to Bina for keeping quiet.

As he stared so steadily ahead, he was neither admiring the stars, which now glinted through an opening in the clouds, nor the effects of firelight among the leaves. He was reflecting on the scrape Bina had got him into with Ivor, who in an old-fashioned way was exigent where the women of his family were in question. He knew perfectly well how he was going to appear to his father as a stupid fellow who didn't know his own mountains and who couldn't take decent care of a little girl. Wincing inwardly, Roddy bent to throw more twigs on the fire.

"Better try to sleep, Bina," he advised.

"I—I don't want to go to sleep," said Bina in a grieved voice. Her eyes brimmed. Two tears rolled heavily down her cheeks.

"What *do* you want, then?" asked Roddy in a puzzled way.

"To—to t-talk," quivered Bina.

"All right," said Roddy, making the effort of his life to be reasonable and kind. "*All* right." And after a wait he added, "Why don't you go ahead?"

"I don't want to," said Bina, almost violently. She lay back on the bed of leaves and gazed up at the chilly stars, which seemed not quite so far away as Roddy.

Roddy kept casting thoughtful glances at Bina. He concluded that she was tired, and nervous about being lost, and that the sooner she got off to sleep the better for them both. He drew a long breath of relief when her soft, regular breathing convinced him that she was off at last. He went back to his own thoughts, and for the most part forgot the little curled-up figure opposite. Toward

morning he must have dozed, head on arms, for he roused at some breaking of bushes, and looked, to find his horse gone. As he stood glancing about him, a barking of dogs assailed his ears. He climbed a small ridge to the right and saw that it came from a cabin close at hand—old Chittum's cabin. Roddy got red all to himself there in the stealing dawn. Had they ridden on for ten minutes they would have reached the cabin and have been put in their way. Everything was conspiring to make him look like a perfect fool.

"Dolt!" he muttered to himself. "Chump!"

He turned at a sound to see Bina peeping at him like a dryad newly emerged from her oak.

"What in the world are you talking to yourself for, Roddy?" asked Bina.

Without replying, Roddy descended the little ridge and saddled Dolly and put Bina into her saddle.

"My horse got loose," he told her then. He added, "See if there isn't an apple for your breakfast in one of my pockets there."

Bina found the apple, broke it in half, and proffered one of the halves to Roddy. He colored with annoyance and made a vexed gesture of rejection. With a swing of the arm which expressed many emotions, Bina flung both halves high and far. One fell short of the world's edge and rolled back toward them. Roddy picked it up and gave it to Dolly.

As they neared the highway, they sighted Roddy's white horse a mile ahead. Beyond him appeared some sort of procession of which they failed to sense the significance. They slid on down, Roddy leading Dolly at arm's length. At the opening into the main road they met the procession. Roddy flared scarlet as he took it in.

Ivor headed it, in the cart, with his gun between his knees; there had been tales of bears seen in the mountains not long before. Behind rode half the neighborhood,

it seemed to Roddy, though there were only a few youngsters who had ridden over to Cedarcliff the evening before for an impromptu frolic. The dogs and Roddy's captured mount made a tail to the procession, which dissolved and gathered about Bina and Roddy.

A look from Ivor brought Roddy to the side of the cart.

"I thought you could be trusted to take care of a girl," said Ivor. His contemptuous tone carried cruelly.

Roddy turned away, white to the clamped lips, from which wild horses could have dragged no explanation after that injustice from Ivor. Everyone talked kindly and loudly and all together. Roddy's eyes were hard as he watched them put Bina into the cart and give her a spectacular and totally unnecessary sip of brandy. He held his head high as he went to get his horse from Geoff.

"It was every bit my fault, Uncle Roderick," Bina was saying. Her voice came clearly.

"That's all very well *now*," said Geoff scornfully. But Roddy wasn't going to tell Geoff anything. Not even when they had quite separated themselves from the procession and fallen far behind was he going to tell Geoff anything.

Geoff glanced at Roddy's profile. He had never before noticed how much alike Roddy and Mary were.

"Still," said Geoff, "what's a fellow to do about it?"

Roddy did look at him then gratefully and jeeringly.

"First aid to an idiot," said Roddy. "Thank you, Geoff."

Late that evening, as he wandered in the back way from having a solitary row on the creek, his father hailed him.

Roddy came and stood at attention just within Ivor's door. His hard look had been replaced by a patient one.

"I thought I told you to be in by twelve every night," said Ivor, glancing up at his old clock, always the best part of an hour fast, to put it without exaggeration.

"Staying out all night seems to be getting a habit with you."

If Roddy had been a girl his lips would have quivered at this shameless unfairness. There was a perceptible pause before he answered:

"Sorry, sir. It sha'n't happen again."

He went on out, disdaining the slightest glance at the lying, leering clock-face.

At the head of the steps Bina rose up before him, and clasped his arm with both her eager hands.

"Roddy," said Bina, "I wouldn't blame you a bit for saying—*it*—to me now." Her voice quivered.

"I don't want to say it to you, dear," said Roddy. "You meant no harm, I know. For goodness' sake, go to bed!"

"I told Uncle Rod it was all my fault; but he wouldn't listen to a word from me. He is perfectly unreas——"

"Sh-h!" said Roddy. His eyes on her flushed, remorseful, adorable face were jesting, sweet. "I forgive you," said Roddy.

He took her by the shoulders and turned her bedward.

Little Pen was lonesome that hot, windy August afternoon. His father, never a person to be depended on for companionship, pounded away on the type-writer in the office. Bina sat in the office door, and read her great-grandmother's love-letters, taking them one by one from an inexhaustible yellow bundle on her knees. Into her absorption Pen could pry no wedge of a plea to come and play. Uncle Rod was off somewhere. Aunt Kathy and Mary had driven to town that morning. Miss Lizzie had gone visiting.

But even as little Pen stood in the middle of the lawn and looked hopelessly about him he caught sight of the orange edges of Roddy's jersey under the willows by the creek.

"Take me in swimming, Roddy!" he shrieked. He tore at the buttons of his blue Dutch waist as he ran.

It was splendid sport to get on Roddy's back, and feel him forging strongly up the creek with you, thought Pen; all the better sport if you were really afraid a bit.

"Now you do exactly as I tell you," said Roddy, taking him on board. Little Pen promised faithfully that he would do exactly as Roddy told him.

In the long, quiet stretch of water between the house and the old disused watermill Pen had a good time. He pretended all the way that Roddy was a whale carrying him far out to sea, never to be seen again by the neglectful Bina.

"Here you," said Roddy, turning about to go back, "don't squeeze me like that!"

Pen's arms relaxed. He pretended now that he had relented, and ordered the whale to take him home because Bina was crying.

Suddenly he slipped and grabbed tighter.

"Don't hold me by the neck, Pen!" said Roddy, hurriedly and urgently. "Catch me under the arms—*quick!*"

Pen got rattled by Roddy's strange tone, and hugged the tighter.

Like all good swimmers, Roddy had imagined that he alone of all the world was immune against drowning; but he changed his mind with horrible suddenness as he sank with little Pen's arms in a strangle-hold around his throat. When he rose he was making a frantic effort to free himself. All at once, at a shout from the bank, the child's arms loosed, and somewhere in the deep hole by the big rock Roddy lost the incubus which had dragged him down for the second time. But on again reaching surface he clawed ineffectively at air, and his breast and his brain were bursting. The third time Roddy came up a rope lay floating across his face; but though he would have been grateful for it earlier in this game of life and death, he

felt quite comfortable and contented now, and he didn't want their silly old rope. As he sank peacefully for the last time he kept noticing the rope swaying in the water above his face.

After he got little Pen out, Hobson dived again after Roddy. Some one from the stables had come by then, and between them they carried Roddy to the office.

Half an hour later Hobson and the cousin doctor, whom Bina had been able to summon quickly, straightened up and stood looking at the inert figure prone on the floor over the old cushion off the lounge. The arms dangled. The bright head sank. It seemed asking piteously to be let alone. Their cessation of effort made an ominous hush in the room, which roused Bina from her still pose in the doorway.

"You are not going to give up *yet?*" she cried, turning on them. Her incredulous tone made them stoop instantly, and pretend that they had never thought of giving up.

She watched them now, suspicious of their every movement. Sometimes she looked from the door, hoping to see Ivor, whom a boy had gone to find; but mostly she fastened her intent gaze on that inert figure, so strangely Roddy. Only the dazzling dark head had any semblance of life. The eyelashes brushed marble. The lips breathed no more than the lips of a statue. The temples were faint hollows in pale stone.

"Let me rub awhile," said Bina to Hobson, noting his air of exhaustion. "I've strong wrists."

"Let her," nodded Wayne to Hobson.

Bina looked steadily from the window in front of her as she strove, trying to draw back to Roddy one little breath of that life all about them, in the sun-flooded air, in the carelessly onward-flowing water, in the wide, beloved landscape, wherein vivid memory images of Roddy and Bina moved as she looked. They rode through cool

forests, walked quietly in flower-edged meadows, stood dumbly together on high mountain places, and grew toward heaven as they gazed, or played, like the children they were, on old stretches of shadowed lawn. Yet all the while she was intensely aware of that inertness with which her will strove blindly.

When next she glanced around, Ivor had taken Wayne's place over Roddy. He was asking Hobson about it, and Hobson was telling him in low tones, as if Roddy were dead.

Presently Hobson relieved Ivor. Now that he was inactive, Ivor had time to despair. He kept taking out his watch. After a while he went to the door to listen. It was growing late, and he expected momently to hear Mary's call at the ferry.

On turning back into the room he got the full effect of the tormented helplessness of the prone young body. The brilliant August afternoon sunlight poured over it. The wind lifted its shining hair. But it was a dead thing for the sunlight to pour along, for the wind to play with. It was a desecrated thing whereon blundering grief destroyed the dignity of Death's dreadful handiwork.

Ivor strode forward with an arresting gesture.

"I can't bear that any longer," he said in a choked voice.

Hobson and Wayne exchanged glances, and Wayne stood up.

"Well, we've been at it for an hour and a half now," said Wayne. He would speak in that hushed way, as if Roddy were dead.

Bina ran and caught Ivor's arm.

"Go on!" she ordered Wayne. She looked like a young Clotho daring Atropos to use her shears on Roddy's thread of life.

Again Hobson and Wayne exchanged glances.

"Get Ivor out of here, then," muttered Wayne.

"You won't stop?" asked Bina. Wayne promised Bina that they would not stop.

Ivor went with Bina dazedly. He was mulling over the last week in his miserable mind. He had not given Roddy a decently kind word since the Hanging Rock episode. He felt that he might stand what was happening better if he had not been so unjust to Roddy, his one good boy. Yet he knew, and could not help feeling that Roddy, too, had known, the injustice to be only the expression of an exacting love and pride—— Where was the poor child taking him?

He glanced, bewildered, about the old school-room. Still mothering him with an arm, Bina was taking down a battered school-book. She opened it deftly with her free hand to a page picturing drowned manikins being restored to consciousness.

"Do not give up hope," read Bina, looking up in Ivor's face to see if he was listening. *"Keep up artificial respiration for three hours, if necessary, for persons have been revived after showing no signs of life for that length of time."*

Bina was saying this by heart, still looking anxiously up in Ivor's face. Ivor made a shamed and fearful effort to get hold of himself. He could not help hoping again.

"I see," he said. "Let us go back. I won't make a fool of myself again. It was—just—watching them at him."

Bina understood that. Her arm around Ivor shook.

When they returned Hobson was standing, watch in hand. He put it in his pocket with a guilty start, and took Wayne's place at the lifting, while Ivor again knelt and rubbed, always upward, to get the blood back to the heart. Ivor tried not to think. It was indeed easy not to think, with his heart bursting within him, as if he drowned and suffocated in sorrow.

The sunlight turned pink, and slid with strange suddenness off Roddy and on to Hobson's manuscript, which the wind, now laid, had blown to the floor. In the thick, hot sunset silence they heard Mary's call at the ferry.

"Oh, my God!" said Ivor. His hands dropped with a gesture which yielded. He rose, and stood looking across the river. And Roddy had promised never to give Ivor and Kathy any more trouble.

With a stealthy glance at Bina, Wayne straightened on his knees, and shook his cramped wrists. Hobson stooped and picked up his manuscript, though he did not in the least know that he did this. Nor did he know that a subconscious devil in his brain was whispering, "d. Roderick Ivor, Jr., August 22, 19——." Hobson gave a violent start, and threw the manuscript from him in amazed horror. As it fluttered down, Wayne got to his feet, and moved to Ivor's side.

For the moment the figure on the floor lay deserted. An advancing shadow stole away even the brightness from the hair. Very quietly Bina went and stood near, gazing down, her hands clasped laxly, touched for the first time with the utter hopelessness which obsessed the men. Then her heart cried once more that it could not be, and she fell to her knees and began to lift at Roddy herself. Her arms felt pulled from their sockets. Her long hair came down and got in her eyes and her way. She panted with supreme effort. Finally her tears of helplessness streamed.

"Oh, I'm not strong enough!" she gasped, looking up at the group of men standing darkly in the doorway.

Ivor left the group with a sudden movement of resolution.

"Get up!" he said gently to Bina.

And it appeared to Ivor as he again began lifting that there was some difference, some resistance, some lack, however slight, of that terrible inertia which so destroyed

his power of hoping. His startled glance said all this to Wayne, who stooped quickly.

"By George!" cried Wayne. His tone rang.

When Roddy opened his eyes from where they had put him on the old lounge, his first thought was that a strand of Bina's hair, as she bent, helping to wind hot blankets about him, was Hob's silly old rope. Then her face, wet with joyful tears, came clear, and he spoke a word weakly.

"Pen?" said Wayne. "Oh, he's all right. Go get him, Bina."

As Bina ran to get little Pen, Roddy looked about him. Absurdly enough, every one seemed on the verge of tears.

"What's it all about?" asked Roddy in a more natural tone.

They told him.

"*Two hours and a half*—stuff!"

Then his eyes took in the late slant of sunlight on the floor, and filled with belated comprehension.

"And you kept at me all that time?" he said in a quite different tone.

The three men stole glances at one another. They were abashed by that praise of high wonderment in Roddy's voice and look.

Roddy kept watching them. It seemed to him that the three of them had a look in common, a queer, shamefaced expression. And what was Hob mumbling about Bina?

A great light blazed in on Roddy. He grinned angelically.

"Oh, I *believe* you," he said; "*I* believe you. I'll bet old Waynes wouldn't have kept at me for two hours and a half if it hadn't been for *Bina*."

He struggled feebly with Ivor's arms and the wound blanket, and managed to sit up as Bina entered, lugging little Pen.

"Come here," said Roddy, reaching out both hands to her, "and get the compliment of your life."

He drew her down until her long brown hair bathed their clasping hands. His lifted eyes shone with deep, spiritual mischief.

"Bina," said Roddy. He found that his voice was not quite steady. He waited a moment before going on. "Bina, you are a persistent little fool."

THE COUNTRY OF THE BLIND[1]

H. G. Wells

THREE hundred miles and more from Chimborazo, one hundred from the snows of Cotopaxi, in the wildest wastes of Ecuador's Andes, there lies that mysterious mountain valley, cut off from all the world of men, the Country of the Blind. Long years ago that valley lay so far open to the world that men might come at last through frightful gorges and over an icy pass into its equable meadows, and thither indeed men came, a family or so of Peruvian half-breeds, fleeing from the lust and tyranny of an evil Spanish ruler. Then came the stupendous outbreak of Mindobamba, when it was night in Quito for seventeen days, and the water was boiling at Yaguachi and all the fish floating dying even as far as Guayaquil; everywhere along the Pacific slopes there were land-slips and swift thawings and sudden floods, and one whole side of the old Arauca crest slipped and came down in thunder, and cut off the Country of the Blind forever from the exploring feet of men. But one of these early settlers had chanced to be on the hither side of the gorges when the world had so terribly shaken itself, and he perforce had to forget his wife and his child and all the friends and possessions he had left up there, and start life over again in the lower world. He started it again but ill, blindness overtook him, and he died of punishment in the mines; but the story he told begot a legend that lingers along the length of the Cordilleras of the Andes to this day.

[1]Reprinted from *The Country of the Blind,* by H. G. Wells, by and with permission of and special arrangement with the author.

He told of his reason for venturing back from that fastness, into which he had first been carried lashed to a llama, beside a vast bale of gear, when he was a child. The valley, he said, had in it all that the heart of man could desire—sweet water, pasture, an even climate, slopes of rich brown soil with tangles of a shrub that bore an excellent fruit, and on one side great hanging forests of pine that held the avalanches high. Far overhead, on three sides, vast cliffs of gray-green rock were capped by cliffs of ice; but the glacier stream came not to them, but flowed away by the farther slopes, and only now and then huge ice masses fell on the valley side. In this valley it neither rained nor snowed, but the abundant springs gave a rich green pasture, that irrigation would spread over all the valley space. The settlers did well indeed there. Their beasts did well and multiplied, and but one thing marred their happiness. Yet it was enough to mar it greatly. A strange disease had come upon them and had made all the children born to them there—and, indeed, several older children also—blind. It was to seek some charm or antidote against this plague of blindness that he had with fatigue and danger and difficulty returned down the gorge. In those days, in such cases, men did not think of germs and infections, but of sins, and it seemed to him that the reason of this affliction must lie in the negligence of these priestless immigrants to set up a shrine so soon as they entered the valley. He wanted a shrine—a handsome, cheap, effectual shrine—to be erected in the valley; he wanted relics and such-like potent things of faith, blessed objects and mysterious medals and prayers. In his wallet he had a bar of native silver for which he would not account; he insisted there was none in the valley with something of the insistence of an inexpert liar. They had all clubbed their money and ornaments together, having little need for such treasure up there, he said, to buy them holy help against their ill. I figure this

dim-eyed mountaineer, sun-burnt, gaunt, and anxious, hat brim clutched feverishly, a man all unused to the ways of the lower world, telling this story to some keen-eyed, attentive priest before the great convulsion; I can picture him presently seeking to return with pious and infallible remedies against that trouble, and the infinite dismay with which he must have faced the tumbled vastness where the gorge had once come out. But the rest of his story of mischances is lost to me, save that I knew of his evil death after several years. Poor stray from that remoteness! The stream that had once made the gorge now bursts from the mouth of a rocky cave, and the legend his poor, ill-told story set going developed into the legend of a race of blind men somewhere "over there" one may still hear to-day.

And amidst the little population of that now isolated and forgotten valley the disease ran its course. The old became groping, the young saw but dimly, and the children that were born to them never saw at all. But life was very easy in that snow-rimmed basin, lost to all the world, with neither thorns nor briers, with no evil insects nor any beasts save the gentle breed of llamas they had lugged and thrust and followed up the beds of the shrunken rivers in the gorges up which they had come. The seeing had become purblind so gradually that they scarcely noticed their loss. They guided the sightless youngsters hither and thither until they knew the whole valley marvelously, and when at last sight died out among them the race lived on. They had even time to adapt themselves to the blind control of fire, which they made carefully in stoves of stone. They were a simple strain of people at the first, unlettered, only slightly touched with Spanish civilization, but with something of a tradition of the arts of old Peru and of its lost philosophy. Generation followed generation. They forgot many things; they devised many things. Their tradition of the greater world

they came from became mythical in color and uncertain. In all things save sight they were strong and able, and presently chance sent one who had an original mind and who could talk and persuade among them, and then afterwards another. These two passed, leaving their effects, and the little community grew in numbers and in understanding, and met and settled social and economic problems that arose. Generation followed generation. Generation followed generation. There came a time when a child was born who was fifteen generations from that ancestor who went out of the valley with a bar of silver to seek God's aid, and who never returned. Thereabout it chanced that a man came into this country from the outer world. And this is the story of that man.

He was a mountaineer from the country near Quito, a man who had been down to the sea and had seen the world, a reader of books in an original way, an acute and enterprising man, and he was taken on by a party of Englishmen who had come out to Ecuador to climb mountains, to replace one of their three Swiss guides who had fallen ill. He climbed here and he climbed there, and then came the attempt on Parascotopetl, the Matterhorn of the Andes, in which he was lost to the outer world. The story of that accident has been written a dozen times. Pointer's narrative is the best. He tells how the little party worked their difficult and almost vertical way up to the very foot of the last and greatest precipice, and how they built a night shelter amidst the snow upon a little shelf of rock, and, with a touch of real dramatic power, how presently they found Nunez had gone from them. They shouted, and there was no reply; shouted and whistled, and for the rest of that night they slept no more.

As the morning broke they saw the traces of his fall. It seems impossible he could have uttered a sound. He had slipped eastward toward the unknown side of the

mountain; far below he had struck a steep slope of snow, and ploughed his way down it in the midst of a snow avalanche. His track went straight to the edge of a frightful precipice, and beyond that everything was hidden. Far, far below, and hazy with distance, they could see trees rising out of a narrow, shut-in valley—the lost Country of the Blind. But they did not know it was the lost Country of the Blind, nor distinguish it in any way from any other narrow streak of upland valley. Unnerved by this disaster, they abandoned their attempt in the afternoon, and Pointer was called away to the war before he could make another attack. To this day Parascotopetl lifts an unconquered crest, and Pointer's shelter crumbles unvisited amidst the snows.

And the man who fell survived.

At the end of the slope he fell a thousand feet, and came down in the midst of a cloud of snow upon a snow-slope even steeper than the one above. Down this he was whirled, stunned and insensible, but without a bone broken in his body; and then at last came to gentler slopes, and at last rolled out and lay still, buried amidst a softening heap of the white masses that had accompanied and saved him. He came to himself with a dim fancy that he was ill in bed; then realized his position with a mountaineer's intelligence and worked himself loose, and, after a rest or so, out until he saw the stars. He rested flat upon his chest for a space, wondering where he was and what had happened to him. He explored his limbs, and discovered that several of his buttons were gone and his coat turned over his head. His knife had gone from his pocket and his hat was lost, though he had tied it under his chin. He recalled that he had been looking for loose stones to raise his piece of the shelter wall. His ice-axe had disappeared.

He decided he must have fallen, and looked up to see, exaggerated by the ghastly light of the rising moon, the

tremendous flight he had taken. For a while he lay, gazing blankly at the vast, pale cliff towering above, rising moment by moment out of a subsiding tide of darkness. Its phantasmal, mysterious beauty held him for a space, and then he was seized with a paroxysm of sobbing laughter. . . .

After a great interval of time he became aware that he was near the lower edge of the snow. Below, down what was now a moon-lit and practicable slope, he saw the dark and broken appearance of rock-strewn turf. He struggled to his feet, aching in every joint and limb, got down painfully from the heaped loose snow about him, went downward until he was on the turf, and there dropped rather than lay beside a boulder, drank deep from a flask in his inner pocket, and instantly fell asleep. . . .

He was awakened by the singing of birds in the trees far below.

He sat up and perceived he was on a little alp at the foot of a vast precipice that sloped only a little in the gully down which he and his snow had come. Over against him another wall of rock reared itself against the sky. The gorge between these precipices ran east and west and was full of the morning sunlight, which lit to the westward the mass of fallen mountain that closed the descending gorge. Below him it seemed there was a precipice equally steep, but behind the snow in the gully he found a sort of chimney-cleft dripping with snow-water, down which a desperate man might venture. He found it easier than it seemed, and came at last to another desolate alp, and then after a rock climb of no particular difficulty, to a steep slope of trees. He took his bearings and turned his face up the gorge, for he saw it opened out above upon green meadows, among which he now glimpsed quite distinctly a cluster of stone huts of unfamiliar fashion. At times his progress was like clambering along the face of a wall, and after a time the rising sun ceased

to strike along the gorge, the voices of the singing birds died away, and the air grew cold and dark about him. But the distant valley with its houses was all the brighter for that. He came presently to talus, and among the rocks he noted—for he was an observant man—an unfamiliar fern that seemed to clutch out of the crevices with intense green hands. He picked a frond or so and gnawed its stalk, and found it helpful.

About midday he came at last out of the throat of the gorge into the plain and the sunlight. He was stiff and weary; he sat down in the shadow of a rock, filled up his flask with water from a spring and drank it down, and remained for a time, resting, before he went on to the houses.

They were very strange to his eyes, and indeed the whole aspect of that valley became, as he regarded it, queerer and more unfamiliar. The greater part of its surface was lush green meadow, starred with many beautiful flowers, irrigated with extraordinary care, and bearing evidence of systematic cropping piece by piece. High up and ringing the valley about was a wall, and what appeared to be a circumferential water channel, from which the little trickles of water that fed the meadow plants came, and on the higher slopes above this flocks of llamas cropped the scanty herbage. Sheds, apparently shelters or feeding-places for the llamas, stood against the boundary wall here and there. The irrigation streams ran together into a main channel down the center of the valley, and this was enclosed on either side by a wall breast high. This gave a singularly urban quality to this secluded place, a quality that was greatly enhanced by the fact that a number of paths paved with black and white stones, and each with a curious little curb at the side, ran hither and thither in an orderly manner. The houses of the central village were quite unlike the casual and higgledy-piggledy agglomeration of the mountain villages he knew; they stood in a continuous row on either

side of a central street of astonishing cleanness, here and there their parti-colored façade was pierced by a door, and not a solitary window broke their even frontage. They were parti-colored with extraordinary irregularity, smeared with a sort of plaster that was sometimes gray, sometimes drab, sometimes slate-colored or dark brown; and it was the sight of this wild plastering first brought the word "blind" into the thoughts of the explorer. "The good man who did that," he thought, "must have been as blind as a bat."

He descended a steep place, and so came to the wall and channel that ran about the valley, near where the latter spouted out its surplus contents into the deeps of the gorge in a thin and wavering thread of cascade. He could now see a number of men and women resting on piled heaps of grass, as if taking a siesta, in the remoter part of the meadow, and nearer the village a number of recumbent children, and then nearer at hand three men carrying pails on yokes along a little path that ran from the encircling wall toward the houses. These latter were clad in garments of llama cloth and boots and belts of leather, and they wore caps of cloth with back and ear flaps. They followed one another in single file, walking slowly and yawning as they walked, like men who have been up all night. There was something so reassuringly prosperous and respectable in their bearing that after a moment's hesitation Nunez stood forward as conspicuously as possible upon his rock, and gave vent to a mighty shout that echoed round the valley. The three men stopped, and moved their heads as though they were looking about them. They turned their faces this way and that, and Nunez gesticulated with freedom. But they did not appear to see him for all his gestures, and after a time, directing themselves toward the mountains far away to the right, they shouted as if in answer. Nunez bawled again, and then once more, and as he gestured ineffectually the

word "blind" came up to the top of his thoughts. "The fools must be blind," he said.

When at last, after much shouting and wrath, Nunez crossed the stream by a little bridge, came through a gate in the wall, and approached them, he was sure that they were blind. He was sure that this was the Country of the Blind of which the legends told. Conviction had sprung upon him, and a sense of great and rather enviable adventure. The three stood side by side, not looking at him, but with their ears directed toward him, judging him by his unfamiliar steps. They stood close together like men a little afraid, and he could see their eyelids closed and sunken, as though the very balls beneath had shrunk away. There was an expression near awe on their faces.

"A man," one said, in hardly recognizable Spanish. "A man it is—a man or a spirit—coming down from the rocks."

But Nunez advanced with the confident steps of a youth who enters upon life. All the old stories of the lost valley and the Country of the Blind had come back to his mind, and through his thoughts ran this old proverb, as if it were a refrain:

"In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King."

"In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King."

And very civilly he gave them greeting. He talked to them and used his eyes.

"Where does he come from, Brother Pedro?" asked one.

"Down out of the rocks."

"Over the mountains I come," said Nunez, "out of the country beyond there—where men can see. From near Bogotá—where there are a hundred thousands of people, and where the city passes out of sight."

"Sight?" muttered Pedro. "Sight?"

"He comes," said the second blind man, "out of the rocks."

The cloth of their coats, Nunez saw, was curious fashioned, each with a different sort of stitching.

They startled him by a simultaneous movement toward him, each with a hand outstretched. He stepped back from the advance of those spread fingers.

"Come hither," said the third blind man, following his motion and clutching him neatly.

And they held Nunez and felt him over, saying no word further until they had done so.

"Carefully," he cried, with a finger in his eye, and found they thought that organ, with its fluttering lids, a queer thing in him. They went over it again.

"A strange creature, Correa," said the one called Pedro. "Feel the coarseness of his hair. Like a llama's hair."

"Rough he is as the rocks that begot him," said Correa, investigating Nunez's unshaven chin with a soft and slightly moist hand. "Perhaps he will grow finer."

Nunez struggled a little under their examination, but they gripped him firm.

"Carefully," he said again.

"He speaks," said the third man. "Certainly he is a man."

"Ugh!" said Pedro, at the roughness of his coat.

"And you have come into the world?" asked Pedro.

"*Out* of the world. Over the mountains and glaciers; right over above there, halfway to the sun. Out of the great, big world that goes down, twelve days' journey from the sea."

They scarcely seemed to heed him. "Our fathers have told us men may be made by the forces of Nature," said Correa. "It is the warmth of things, and moisture, and rottenness—rottenness."

"Let us lead him to the elders," said Pedro.

"Shout first," said Correa, "lest the children be afraid. This is a marvelous occasion."

So they shouted, and Pedro went first and took Nunez by the hand to lead him to the houses.

He drew his hand away. "I can see," he said.

"See?" said Correa.

"Yes; see," said Nunez, turning toward him, and stumbled against Pedro's pail.

"His senses are still imperfect," said the third blind man. "He stumbles, and talks unmeaning words. Lead him by the hand."

"As you will," said Nunez, and was led along laughing.

It seemed they knew nothing of sight.

Well, all in good time he would teach them.

He heard people shouting, and saw a number of figures gathering together in the middle roadway of the village.

He found it tax his nerve and patience more than he had anticipated, that first encounter with the population of the Country of the Blind. The place seemed larger as he drew near to it, and the smeared plasterings queerer, and a crowd of children and men and women (the women and girls he was pleased to note had, some of them, quite sweet faces, for all that their eyes were shut and sunken) came about him, holding on to him, touching him with soft, sensitive hands, smelling at him, and listening at every word he spoke. Some of the maidens and children, however, kept aloof as if afraid, and indeed his voice seemed coarse and rude beside their softer notes. They mobbed him. His three guides kept close to him with an effort of proprietorship, and said again and again, "A wild man out of the rocks."

"Bogotá," he said. "Bogotá. Over the mountain crests."

"A wild man—using wild words," said Pedro. "Did you hear that——"

"Bogotá? His mind has hardly formed yet. He has only the beginnings of speech."

A little boy nipped his hand. "Bogotá!" he said mockingly.

"Aye! A city to your village. I come from the great world—where men have eyes and see."

"His name's Bogotá," they said.

"He stumbled—" said Correa—"stumbled twice as we came hither."

"Bring him in to the elders."

And they thrust him suddenly through a doorway into a room as black as pitch, save at the end there faintly glowed a fire. The crowd closed in behind him and shut out all but the faintest glimmer of day, and before he could arrest himself he had fallen headlong over the feet of a seated man. His arm, outflung, struck the face of someone else as he went down; he felt the soft impact of features and heard a cry of anger, and for a moment he struggled against a number of hands that clutched him. It was a one-sided fight. An inkling of the situation came to him and he lay quiet.

"I fell down," he said; "I couldn't see in this pitchy darkness."

There was a pause as if the unseen persons about him tried to understand his words. Then the voice of Correa said: "He is but newly formed. He stumbles as he walks and mingles words that mean nothing with his speech."

Others also said things about him that he heard or understood imperfectly.

"May I sit up?" he asked, in a pause. "I will not struggle against you again."

They consulted and let him rise.

The voice of an older man began to question him, and Nunez found himself trying to explain the great world out of which he had fallen, and the sky and mountains and

such-like marvels, to these elders who sat in darkness in the Country of the Blind. And they would believe and understand nothing whatever that he told them, a thing quite outside his expectation. They would not ever understand many of his words. For fourteen generations these people had been blind and cut off from all the seeing world; the names for all the things of sight had faded and changed; the story of the outer world was faded and changed to a child's story; and they had ceased to concern themselves with anything beyond the rocky slopes above their circling wall. Blind men of genius had arisen among them and questioned the shreds of belief and tradition they had brought with them from their seeing days, and had dismissed all these things as idle fancies and replaced them with new and saner explanations. Much of their imagination had shriveled with their eyes, and they had made for themselves new imaginations with their ever more sensitive ears and finger tips. Slowly Nunez realized this: that his expectation of wonder and reverence at his origin and his gifts was not to be borne out; and after his poor attempt to explain sight to them had been set aside as the confused version of a new-made being describing the marvels of his incoherent sensations, he subsided, a little dashed, into listening to their instruction. And the eldest of the blind men explained to him life and philosophy and religion, how that the world (meaning their valley) had been first an empty hollow in the rocks, and then had come first inanimate things without the gift of touch, and llamas and a few other creatures that had little sense, and then men, and at last angels, whom one could hear singing and making fluttering sounds, but whom no one could touch at all, which puzzled Nunez greatly until he thought of the birds.

He went on to tell Nunez how this time had been divided into the warm and the cold, which are the blind equivalents of day and night, and how it was good to sleep

in the warm and work during the cold, so that now, but for his advent, the whole town of the blind would have been asleep. He said Nunez must have been specially created to learn and serve the wisdom they had acquired, and that for all his mental incoherency and stumbling behavior he must have courage and do his best to learn, and at that all the people in the doorway murmured encouragingly. He said the night—for the blind call their day night—was now far gone, and it behooved everyone to go back to sleep. He asked Nunez if he knew how to sleep, and Nunez said he did, but that before sleep he wanted food. They brought him food, llama's milk in a bowl and rough salted bread, and led him into a lonely place to eat out of their hearing, and afterward to slumber until the chill of the mountain evening roused them to begin their day again. But Nunez slumbered not at all.

Instead, he sat up in the place where they had left him, resting his limbs and turning the unanticipated circumstances of his arrival over and over in his mind.

Every now and then he laughed, sometimes with amusement and sometimes with indignation.

"Unformed mind!" he said. "Got no senses yet. They little know they've been insulting their Heaven-sent King and master. . . .

"I see I must bring them to reason.

"Let me think.

"Let me think."

He was still thinking when the sun set.

Nunez had an eye for all beautiful things, and it seemed to him that the glow upon the snow-fields and glaciers that rose about the valley on every side was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. His eyes went from that inaccessible glory to the village and irrigated fields, fast sinking into the twilight, and suddenly a wave of emotion took him, and he thanked God from the bottom of his heart that the power of sight had been given him.

He heard a voice calling to him from out of the village.

"Yaho there, Bogotá! Come hither!"

At that he stood up, smiling. He would show these people once and for all what sight would do for a man. They would seek him, but not find him.

"You move not, Bogotá," said the voice.

He laughed noiselessly and made two stealthy steps aside from the path.

"Trample not on the grass, Bogotá; that is not allowed."

Nunez had scarcely heard the sound he made himself. He stopped, amazed.

The owner of the voice came running up the piebald path toward him.

He stepped back into the pathway. "Here I am," he said.

"Why did you not come when I called you?" said the blind man. "Must you be led like a child? Cannot you hear the path as you walk?"

Nunez laughed. "I can see it," he said.

"There is no such word as see," said the blind man, after a pause. "Cease this folly and follow the sound of my feet."

Nunez followed, a little annoyed.

"My time will come," he said.

"You'll learn," the blind man answered. "There is much to learn in the world."

"Has no one told you, 'In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King?' "

"What is blind?" asked the blind man, carelessly, over his shoulder.

Four days passed and the fifth found the King of the Blind still incognito, as a clumsy and useless stranger among his subjects.

It was, he found, much more difficult to proclaim himself than he had supposed, and in the meantime while he

meditated his *coup d'état,* he did what he was told and learnt the manners and customs of the Country of the Blind. He found working and going about at night a particularly irksome thing, and he decided that that should be the first thing he would change.

They led a simple, laborious life, these people, with all the elements of virtue and happiness as these things can be understood by men. They toiled, but not oppressively; they had food and clothing sufficient for their needs; they had days and seasons of rest; they made much of music and singing, and there was love among them and little children. It was marvelous with what confidence and precision they went about their ordered world. Everything, you see, had been made to fit their needs; each of the radiating paths of the valley area had a constant angle to the others, and was distinguished by a special notch upon its curbing; all obstacles and irregularities of path or meadow had long since been cleared away; all their methods of procedure arose naturally from their special needs. Their senses had become marvelously acute; they could hear and judge the slightest gesture of a man a dozen paces away—could hear the very beating of his heart. Intonation had long replaced expression with them, and touches gesture, and their work with hoe and spade and fork was as free and confident as garden work can be. Their sense of smell was extraordinarily fine; they could distinguish individual differences as readily as a dog can, and they went about the tending of llamas, who lived among the rocks above and came to the wall for food and shelter, with ease and confidence. It was only when at last Nunez sought to assert himself that he found how easy and confident their movements could be.

He rebelled only after he had tried persuasion.

He tried at first on several occasions to tell them of sight. "Look you here, you people," he said. "There are things you do not understand in me."

Once or twice one or two of them attended to him; they sat with faces downcast and ears turned intelligently toward him, and he did his best to tell them what it was to see. Among his hearers was a girl, with eyelids less red and sunken than the others, so that one could almost fancy she was hiding eyes, whom especially he hoped to persuade. He spoke of the beauties of sight, of watching the mountains, of the sky and the sunrise, and they heard him with amused incredulity that presently became condemnatory. They told him there were indeed no mountains at all, but that the end of the rocks where the llamas grazed was indeed the end of the world; thence sprang a cavernous roof of the universe, from which the dew and the avalanches fell; and when he maintained stoutly the world had neither end nor roof such as they supposed, they said his thoughts were wicked. So far as he could describe sky and clouds and stars to them it seemed to them a hideous void, a terrible blankness in the place of the smooth roof to things in which they believed—it was an article of faith with them that the cavern roof was exquisitely smooth to the touch. He saw that in some manner he shocked them, and gave up that aspect of the matter altogether, and tried to show them the practical value of sight. One morning he saw Pedro in the path called Seventeen and coming toward the central houses, but still too far off for hearing or scent, and he told them as much. "In a little while," he prophesied, "Pedro will be here." An old man remarked that Pedro had no business on path Seventeen, and then, as if in confirmation, that individual as he drew near turned and went transversely into path Ten, and so back with nimble paces toward the outer wall. They mocked Nunez when Pedro did not arrive, and afterwards, when he asked Pedro questions to clear his character, Pedro denied and outfaced him, and was afterwards hostile to him.

Then he induced them to let him go a long way up the

sloping meadows toward the wall with one complaisant individual, and to him he promised to describe all that happened among the houses. He noted certain goings and comings, but the things that really seemed to signify to these people happened inside or behind the windowless houses—the only things they took note of to test him by—and of those he could see or tell nothing; and it was after the failure of this attempt, and the ridicule they could not repress, that he resorted to force. He thought of seizing a spade and suddenly smiting one or two of them to earth, and so in fair combat showing the advantage of eyes. He went so far with that resolution as to seize his spade, and then he discovered a new thing about himself, and that was that it was impossible for him to hit a blind man in cold blood.

He hesitated, and found them all aware that he had snatched up the spade. They stood all alert, with their heads on one side, and bent ears toward him for what he would do next.

"Put that spade down," said one, and he felt a sort of helpless horror. He came near obedience.

Then he had thrust one backwards against a house wall, and fled past him and out of the village.

He went athwart one of their meadows, leaving a track of trampled grass behind his feet, and presently sat down by the side of one of their ways. He felt something of the buoyancy that comes to all men in the beginning of a fight, but more perplexity. He began to realize that you cannot even fight happily with creatures who stand upon a different mental basis to yourself. Far away he saw a number of men carrying spades and sticks come out of the street of houses and advance in a spreading line along the several paths toward him. They advanced slowly, speaking frequently to one another, and ever and again the whole cordon would halt and sniff the air and listen.

The first time they did this Nunez laughed. But afterwards he did not laugh.

One struck his trail in the meadow grass and came stooping and feeling his way along it.

For five minutes he watched the slow extension of the cordon, and then his vague disposition to do something forthwith became frantic. He stood up, went a pace or so toward the circumferential wall, turned, and went back a little way. There they all stood in a crescent, still and listening.

He also stood still, gripping his spade very tightly in both hands. Should he charge them?

The pulse in his ears ran into the rhythm of "In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King."

Should he charge them?

He looked back at the high and unclimbable wall behind—unclimbable because of its smooth plastering, but withal pierced with many little doors, and at the approaching line of seekers. Behind these others were now coming out of the street of houses.

Should he charge them?

"Bogotá!" called one. "Bogotá! where are you?"

He gripped his spade still tighter and advanced down the meadows toward the place of habitations, and directly he moved they converged upon him. "I'll hit them if they touch me," he swore; "by heaven, I will. I'll hit." He called aloud, "Look here, I'm going to do what I like in this valley. Do you hear? I'm going to do what I like and go where I like."

They were moving in upon him quickly, groping yet moving rapidly. It was like playing blind man's buff with everyone blindfolded except one. "Get hold of him!" cried one. He found himself in the arc of a loose curve of pursuers. He felt suddenly he must be active and resolute.

"You don't understand," he cried, in a voice that was meant to be great and resolute, and which broke. "You are blind and I can see. Leave me alone!"

"Bogotá! Put down that spade and come off the grass!"

The last order, grotesque in its urban familiarity, produced a gust of anger. "I'll hurt you," he said, sobbing with emotion. "By heaven, I'll hurt you! Leave me alone!"

He began to run—not knowing clearly where to run. He ran from the nearest blind man, because it was a horror to hit him. He stopped, and then made a dash to escape from their closing ranks. He made for where a gap was wide, and the men on either side, with a quick perception of the approach of his paces, rushed in on one another. He sprang forward, and then he saw he must be caught, and *swish!* the spade had struck. He felt the soft thud of hand and arm, and the man was down with a yell of pain, and he was through.

Through! And then he was close to the street of houses again, and blind men, whirling spades and stakes, were running with a reasoned swiftness hither and thither. He heard steps behind him just in time, and found a tall man rushing forward and swiping at the sound of him. He lost his nerve, hurled his spade a yard wide of this antagonist, and whirled about and fled, fairly yelling as he dodged another.

He was panic-stricken. He ran furiously to and fro, dodging when there was no need to dodge, and, in his anxiety to see on every side of him at once, stumbling. For a moment he was down, and they heard his fall. Far away in the circumferential wall a little doorway looked like heaven, and he set off in a wild rush for it. He did not even look around at his pursuers until it was gained, and he had stumbled across the bridge, clambered a little way among the rocks, to the surprise and dismay of a

young llama, who went leaping out of sight, and lay down sobbing for breath.

And so his *coup d'état* came to an end.

He stayed outside the wall of the valley of the blind for two nights and days without food or shelter, and meditated upon the Unexpected. During these meditations he repeated very frequently and always with a profounder note of derision the exploded proverb: "In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King." He thought chiefly of ways of fighting and conquering these people, and it grew clear that for him no practicable way was possible. He had no weapons, and now it would be hard to get one.

The canker of civilization had got to him even in Bogotá, and he could not find it in himself to go down and assassinate a blind man. Of course, if he did that, he might then dictate terms on the threat of assassinating them all. But—— Sooner or later he must sleep! . . .

He tried also to find food among the pine trees, to be comfortable under pine boughs while the frost fell at night, and—with less confidence—to catch a llama by artifice in order to try to kill it—perhaps by hammering it with a stone—and so finally, perhaps, to eat some of it. But the llamas had a doubt of him and regarded him with distrustful brown eyes and spat when he drew near. Fear came on him the second day and fits of shivering. Finally he crawled down to the wall of the Country of the Blind and tried to make his terms. He crawled along by the stream, shouting, until two blind men came out to the gate and talked to him.

"I was mad," he said. "But I was only newly made."

They said that was better.

He told them he was wiser now, and repented of all he had done.

Then he wept, without intention, for he was very weak and ill now, and they took that as a favorable sign.

They asked him if he still thought he could "see."

"No," he said. "That was folly. The word means nothing. Less than nothing!"

They asked him what was overhead.

"About ten times the height of a man there is a roof above the world—of rock—and very, very smooth. So smooth—so beautifully smooth . . ." He burst again into hysterical tears. "Before you ask me any more, give me some food or I shall die!"

He expected dire punishment, but these blind people were capable of toleration. They regarded his rebellion as but one more proof of his general idiocy and inferiority, and after they had whipped him they appointed him to do the simplest and heaviest work they had for anyone to do, and he, seeing no other way of living, did submissively what he was told.

He was ill for some days and they nursed him kindly. That refined his submission. But they insisted on his lying in the dark, and that was a great misery. And blind philosophers came and talked to him of the wicked levity of his mind, and reproved him so impressively for his doubts about the lid of rock that covered their cosmic *casserole* that he almost doubted whether indeed he was not the victim of hallucination in not seeing it overhead.

So Nunez became a citizen of the Country of the Blind, and these people ceased to be a generalized people and became individualities to him, and familiar to him, while the world beyond the mountains became more and more remote and unreal. There was Yacob, his master, a kindly man when not annoyed; there was Pedro, Yacob's nephew; and there was Medina-sarote, who was the youngest daughter of Yacob. She was little esteemed in the world of the blind, because she had a clear-cut face and lacked that satisfying, glossy smoothness that is the blind man's ideal of feminine beauty, but Nunez thought her beautiful at first, and presently the most beautiful thing

in the whole creation. Her closed eyelids were not sunken and red after the common way of the valley, but lay as though they might open again at any moment; and she had long eyelashes, which were considered a grave disfigurement. And her voice was weak and did not satisfy the acute hearing of the valley swains. So that she had no lover.

There came a time when Nunez thought that, could he win her, he would be resigned to live in the valley for all the rest of his days.

He watched her; he sought opportunities of doing her little services and presently he found that she observed him. Once at a rest-day gathering they sat side by side in the dim starlight, and the music was sweet. His hand came upon hers and he dared to clasp it. Then very tenderly she returned his pressure. And one day, as they were at their meal in the darkness, he felt her hand very softly seeking him, and as it chanced the fire leapt then, and he saw the tenderness of her face.

He sought to speak to her.

He went to her one day when she was sitting in the summer moonlight spinning. The light made her a thing of silver and mystery. He sat down at her feet and told her he loved her, and told her how beautiful she seemed to him. He had a lover's voice, he spoke with a tender reverence that came near to awe, and she had never before been touched by adoration. She made him no definite answer, but it was clear his words pleased her.

After that he talked to her whenever he could take an opportunity. The valley became the world for him, and the world beyond the mountains where men lived by day seemed no more than a fairy tale he would some day pour into her ears. Very tentatively and timidly he spoke to her of sight.

Sight seemed to her the most poetical of fancies, and she listened to his description of the stars and the moun-

tains and her own sweet white-lit beauty as though it was a guilty indulgence. She did not believe, she could only half understand, but she was mysteriously delighted, and it seemed to him that she completely understood.

His love lost its awe and took courage. Presently he was for demanding her of Yacob and the elders in marriage, but she became fearful and delayed. And it was one of her elder sisters who first told Yacob that Medina-sarote and Nunez were in love.

There was from the first very great opposition to the marriage of Nunez and Medina-sarote; not so much because they valued her as because they held him as a being apart, an idiot, incompetent thing below the permissible level of a man. Her sisters opposed it bitterly as bringing discredit on them all; and old Yacob, though he had formed a sort of liking for his clumsy, obedient serf, shook his head and said the thing could not be. The young men were all angry at the idea of corrupting the race, and one went so far as to revile and strike Nunez. He struck back. Then for the first time he found an advantage in seeing, even by twilight, and after that fight was over no one was disposed to raise a hand against him. But they still found his marriage impossible.

Old Yacob had a tenderness for his last little daughter, and was grieved to have her weep upon his shoulder.

"You see, my dear, he's an idiot. He has delusions; he can't do anything right."

"I know," wept Medina-sarote. "But he's better than he was. He's getting better. And he's strong, dear father, and kind—stronger and kinder than any other man in the world. And he loves me—and, father, I love him."

Old Yacob was greatly distressed to find her inconsolable, and, besides—what made it more distressing—he liked Nunez for many things. So he went and sat in the windowless council-chamber with the other elders and watched the trend of the talk, and said, at the proper time,

"He's better than he was. Very likely, some day, we shall find him as sane as ourselves."

Then afterwards one of the elders, who thought deeply, had an idea. He was a great doctor among these people, their medicine-man, and he had a very philosophical and inventive mind, and the idea of curing Nunez of his peculiarities appealed to him. One day when Yacob was present he returned to the topic of Nunez. "I have examined Nunez," he said, "and the case is clearer to me. I think very probably he might be cured."

"This is what I have always hoped," said old Yacob.

"His brain is affected," said the blind doctor.

The elders murmured assent.

"Now, *what* affects it?"

"Ah!" said old Yacob.

"This," said the doctor, answering his own question. "Those queer things that are called the eyes, and which exist to make an agreeable depression in the face, are diseased, in the case of Nunez, in such a way as to affect his brain. They are greatly distended, he has eyelashes, and his eyelids move, and consequently his brain is in a state of constant irritation and distraction."

"Yes?" said old Yacob. "Yes?"

"And I think I may say with reasonable certainty that, in order to cure him complete, all that we need to do is a simple and easy surgical operation—namely, to remove these irritant bodies."

"And then he will be sane?"

"Then he will be perfectly sane, and a quite admirable citizen."

"Thank heaven for science!" said old Yacob, and went forth at once to tell Nunez of his happy hopes.

But Nunez's manner of receiving the good news struck him as being cold and disappointing.

"One might think," he said, "from the tone you take that you did not care for my daughter."

It was Medina-sarote who persuaded Nunez to face the blind surgeons.

"*You* do not want me," he said, "to lose my gift of sight?"

She shook her head.

"My world is sight."

Her head drooped lower.

"There are the beautiful things, the beautiful little things—the flowers, the lichens amidst the rocks, the light and the softness on a piece of fur, the far sky with its drifting dawn of clouds, the sunsets and the stars. And there is *you*. For you alone it is good to have sight, to see your sweet, serene face, your kindly lips, your dear, beautiful hands folded together. . . . It is these eyes of mine you won, these eyes that hold me to you, that these idiots seek. Instead, I must touch you, hear you, and never see you again. I must come under that roof of rock and stone and darkness, that horrible roof under which your imaginations stoop. . . . *No; you* would not have me do that?"

A disagreeable doubt had arisen in him. He stopped and left the thing a question.

"I wish," she said, "sometimes——" She paused.

"Yes?" he said a little apprehensively.

"I wish sometimes—you would not talk like that."

"Like what?"

"I know it's pretty—it's your imagination. I love it, but *now*——"

He felt cold. *"Now?"* he said faintly.

She sat quite still.

"You mean—you think—I should be better, better perhaps——"

He was realizing things very swiftly. He felt anger perhaps, anger at the dull course of fate, but also sympathy for her lack of understanding—a sympathy near akin to pity.

"Dear," he said, and he could see by her whiteness how tensely her spirit pressed against the things she could not say. He put his arms about her; he kissed her ear, and they sat for a time in silence.

"If I were to consent to this?" he said at last, in a voice that was very gentle.

She flung her arms about him, weeping wildly. "Oh, if you would," she sobbed, "if only you would!"

For a week before the operation that was to raise him from his servitude and inferiority to the level of a blind citizen Nunez knew nothing of sleep, and all through the warm, sunlit hours, while the others slumbered happily, he sat brooding or wandered aimlessly, trying to bring his mind to bear on his dilemma. He had given his answer, he had given his consent, and still he was not sure. And at last work-time was over, the sun rose in splendor over the golden crests, and his last day of vision began for him. He had a few minutes with Medina-sarote before she went apart to sleep.

"To-morrow," he said, "I shall see no more."

"Dear heart!" she answered, and pressed his hands with all her strength.

"They will hurt you but little," she said; "and you are going through this pain, you are going through it, dear lover, for *me*. . . . Dear, if a woman's heart and life can do it, I will repay you. My dearest one, my dearest with the tender voice, I will repay."

He was drenched in pity for himself and her.

He held her in his arms, and pressed his lips to hers and looked on her sweet face for the last time. "Good-bye!" he whispered to that dear sight, "good-bye!"

And then in silence he turned away from her.

She could hear his slow retreating footsteps, and something in the rhythm of them threw her into a passion of weeping.

He walked away.

He had fully meant to go to a lonely place where the meadows were beautiful with white narcissus, and there remain until the hour of his sacrifice should come, but as he walked he lifted up his eyes and saw the morning, the morning like an angel in golden armor, marching down the steeps. . . .

It seemed to him that before this splendor he and this blind world in the valley, and his love and all, were no more than a pit of sin.

He did not turn aside as he had meant to do, but went on and passed through the wall of the circumference and out upon the rocks, and his eyes were always upon the sun-lit ice and snow.

He saw their infinite beauty, and his imagination soared over them to the things beyond he was now to resign forever!

He thought of that great free world that he was parted from, the world that was his own, and he had a vision of those further slopes, distance beyond distance, with Bogotá, a place of multitudinous stirring beauty, a glory by day, a luminous mystery by night, a place of palaces and fountains and statues and white houses, lying beautifully in the middle distance. He thought how for a day or so one might come down through passes drawing ever nearer and nearer to its busy streets and ways. He thought of the river journey, day by day, from great Bogotá to the still vaster world beyond, through towns and villages, forest and desert places, the rushing river day by day, until its banks receded, and the big steamers came splashing by and one had reached the sea—the limitless sea, with its thousand islands, its thousands of islands, and its ships seen dimly far away in their incessant journeyings round and about that greater world. And there, unpent by mountains, one saw the sky—the sky, not such a disc as one saw it here, but an arch of immeasurable blue, a deep of deeps in which the circling stars were floating. . . .

His eyes began to scrutinize the great curtain of the mountains with a keener inquiry.

For example; if one went so, up that gully and to that chimney there, then one might come out high among those stunted pines that ran round in a sort of shelf and rose still higher and higher as it passed above the gorge. And then? That talus might be managed. Thence perhaps a climb might be found to take him up to the precipice that came below the snow; and if that chimney failed, then another farther to the east might serve his purpose better. And then? Then one would be out upon the amber-lit snow there, and halfway up to the crest of those beautiful desolations. And suppose one had good fortune!

He glanced back at the village, and then turned right round and regarded it with folded arms.

He thought of Medina-sarote, and she had become small and remote.

He turned again toward the mountain wall down which the day had come to him.

Then very circumspectly he began his climb.

When sunset came he was no longer climbing, but he was far and high. His clothes were torn, his limbs were bloodstained, he was bruised in many places, but he lay as if he were at his ease, and there was a smile on his face.

From where he rested the valley seemed as if it were in a pit and nearly a mile below. Already it was dim with haze and shadow, though the mountain summits around him were things of light and fire. The mountain summits around him were things of light and fire, and the little things in the rocks near at hand were drenched with light and beauty, a vein of green mineral piercing the gray, a flash of small crystal here and there, a minute, minutely beautiful orange lichen close beside his face. There were deep, mysterious shadows in the gorge, blue deepening into purple, and purple into a luminous darkness, and overhead was the illimitable vastness of the sky. But he heeded

these things no longer, but lay quite still there, smiling as if he were content now merely to have escaped from the Valley of the Blind, in which he had thought to be King. And the glow of the sunset passed, and the night came, and still he lay there, under the cold, clear stars.

THE CURATE'S FRIEND[1]

E. M. Forster

It is uncertain how the Faun came to be in Wiltshire. Perhaps he came over with the Roman legionaries to live with his friends in camp, talking to them of Lucretilis, or Garganus or of the slopes of Etna; they in the joy of their recall forgot to take him on board, and he wept in exile; but at last he found that our hills also understood his sorrows, and rejoiced when he was happy. Or, perhaps he came to be there because he had been there always. There is nothing particularly classical about a faun: it is only that the Greeks and Italians have ever had the sharpest eyes. You will find him in the "Tempest" and the "Benedicite"; and any country which has beech clumps and sloping grass and very clear streams may reasonably produce him.

How I came to see him is a more difficult question. For to see him there is required a certain quality, for which truthfulness is too cold a name and animal spirits too coarse a one, and he alone knows how this quality came to be in me. No man has the right to call himself a fool, but I may say that I then presented the perfect semblance of one. I was facetious without humor and serious without conviction. Every Sunday I would speak to my rural parishioners about the other world in the tone of one who has been behind the scenes, or I would

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explain to them the errors of the Pelagians, or I would warn them against hurrying from one dissipation to another. Every Tuesday I gave what I called "straight talks to my lads"—talks which led straight past anything awkward. And every Tuesday I addressed the Mothers' Union on the duties of wives or widows, and gave them practical hints on the management of a family of ten.

I took myself in, and for a time I certainly took in Emily. I have never known a girl attend so carefully to my sermons, or laugh so heartily at my jokes. It is no wonder that I became engaged. She has made an excellent wife, freely correcting her husband's absurdities, but allowing no one else to breathe a word against them; able to talk about the sub-conscious self in the drawing-room, and yet have an ear for the children crying in the nursery, or the plates breaking in the scullery. An excellent wife —better than I ever imagined. But she has not married me.

Had we stopped indoors that afternoon nothing would have happened. It was all owing to Emily's mother, who insisted on our tea-ing out. Opposite the village, across the stream, was a small chalk down, crowned by a beech copse, and a few Roman earthworks. (I lectured very vividly on those earthworks; they have since proved to be Saxon.) Hither did I drag up a tea-basket and a heavy rug for Emily's mother, while Emily and a little friend went on in front. The little friend—who has played all through a much less important part than he supposes—was a pleasant youth, full of intelligence and poetry, especially of what he called the poetry of earth. He longed to wrest earth's secret from her, and I have seen him press his face passionately into the grass, even when he has believed himself to be alone. Emily was at that time full of vague aspirations, and, though I should have preferred them all to center in me, yet it seemed

unreasonable to deny her such other opportunities for self-culture as the neighborhood provided.

It was then my habit, on reaching the top of any eminence, to exclaim facetiously, "And who will stand on either hand and keep the bridge with me?" at the same moment violently agitating my arms or casting my wide-awake at an imaginary foe. Emily and the friend received my sally as usual, nor could I detect any insincerity in their mirth. Yet I was convinced that someone was present who did not think I had been funny, and any public speaker will understand my growing uneasiness.

I was somewhat cheered by Emily's mother, who puffed up, exclaiming, "Kind Harry, to carry the things! What should we do without you, even now! Oh, what a view. Can you see the dear Cathedral? No. Too hazy. Now *I'm* going to sit *right* on the rug." She smiled mysteriously. "The downs in September, you know."

We gave some perfunctory admiration to the landscape, which is indeed only beautiful to those who admire land, and to them perhaps the most beautiful in England. For here is the body of the great chalk spider who straddles over our island—whose legs are the south downs and the north downs and the Chilterns, and the tips of whose toes poke out at Cromer and Dover. He is a clean creature, who grows as few trees as he can, and those few in tidy clumps, and he loves to be tickled by quickly flowing streams. He is pimpled all over with earthworks, for from the beginning of time men have fought for the privilege of standing on him, and the oldest of our temples is built upon his back.

But in those days I liked my country snug and pretty, full of gentlemen's residences and shady bowers and people who touch their hats. The great somber expanses on which one may walk for miles and hardly shift a landmark or meet a genteel person were still intolerable to

me. I turned away as soon as propriety allowed and said, "And may I now prepare the cup that cheers?"

Emily's mother replied: "Kind man, to help me. I always do say that tea out is worth the extra effort. I wish we led simpler lives." We agreed with her. I spread out the food. "Won't the kettle stand? Oh, but *make* it stand." I did so. There was a little cry, faint but distinct, as of something in pain.

"How silent it all is up here!" said Emily.

I dropped a lighted match on the grass, and again I heard the little cry.

"What is that?" I asked.

"I only said it was so silent," said Emily.

"Silent, indeed," echoed the little friend.

Silent! The place was full of noises. If the match had fallen in a drawing-room it could not have been worse, and the loudest noise came from beside Emily herself. I had exactly the sensation of going to a great party, of waiting to be announced in the echoing hall, where I could hear the voices of the guests but could not yet see their faces. It is a nervous moment for a self-conscious man, especially if all the voices should be strange to him, and he has never met his host.

"My dear Harry!" said the elder lady, "never mind about the match. That'll smoulder away and harm no one. Tea-ee-ee! I always say—and you will find Emily the same—that as the magic hour of five approaches, no matter how good a lunch, one begins to feel a sort of——"

Now the Faun is of the kind who capers upon the Neo-Attic reliefs, and if you do not notice his ears or see his tail, you take him for a man and are horrified.

"Bathing!" I cried wildly. "Such a thing for our village lads, but I quite agree—more supervision—I blame myself. Go away, bad boy, go away!"

"What will he think of next!" said Emily, while the

creature beside her stood up and beckoned to me. I advanced struggling and gesticulating with tiny steps and horrified cries, exorcising the apparition with my hat. Not otherwise had I advanced the day before, when Emily's nieces showed me their guinea pigs. And by no less hearty laughter was I greeted now. Until the strange fingers closed upon me, I still thought that here was one of my parishioners and did not cease to exclaim, "Let me go, naughty boy, let go!" And Emily's mother, believing herself to have detected the joke, replied, "Well, I must confess they are naughty boys and reach one even on the rug: the downs in September, as I said before."

Here I caught sight of the tail, uttered a wild shriek and fled into the beech copse behind.

"Harry would have been a born actor," said Emily's mother as I left them.

I realized that a great crisis in my life was approaching, and that if I failed in it I might permanently lose my self-esteem. Already in the wood I was troubled by a multitude of voices—the voices of the hill beneath me, of the trees over my head, of the very insects in the bark of the tree. I could even hear the stream licking little pieces out of the meadows, and the meadows dreamily protesting. Above the din—which is no louder than the flight of a bee—rose the Faun's voice saying, "Dear priest, be placid, be placid; why are you frightened?"

"I am not frightened," said I—and indeed I was not. "But I am grieved: you have disgraced me in the presence of ladies."

"No one else has seen me," he said, smiling idly. "The women have tight boots and the man has long hair. Those kinds never see. For years I have only spoken to children, and they lose sight of me as soon as they grow up. But you will not be able to lose sight of me, and until you die you will be my friend. Now I begin

to make you happy; lie upon your back, or run races, or climb trees, or shall I get you blackberries, or harebells, or wives——"

In a terrible voice I said to him, "Get thee behind me!" He got behind me. "Once for all," I continued, "let me tell you that it is vain to tempt one whose happiness consists in giving happiness to others."

"I cannot understand you," he said ruefully. "What is to tempt?"

"Poor woodland creature!" said I, turning round. "How could you understand? It was idle of me to chide you. It is not in your little nature to comprehend a life of self-denial. Ah! if only I could reach you!"

"You have reached him," said the hill.

"If only I could touch you!"

"You have touched him," said the hill.

"But I will never leave you," burst out the Faun. "I will sweep out your shrine for you, I will accompany you to the meetings of matrons. I will enrich you at bazaars."

I shook my head. "For these things I care not at all. And indeed I was minded to reject your offer of service altogether. There I was wrong. You shall help me—you shall help me to make others happy."

"Dear priest, what a curious life! People whom I have never seen—people who cannot see me—why should I make them happy?"

"My poor lad—perhaps in time you will learn why. Now begone: commence. On this very hill sits a young lady for whom I have a high regard. Commence with her. Aha! your face falls. I thought as much. You *cannot* do anything. Here is the conclusion of the whole matter!"

"I can make her happy," he replied, "if you order me! and when I have done so, perhaps you will trust me more."

Emily's mother had started home, but Emily and the

little friend still sat beside the tea-things—she in her white piqué dress and biscuit straw, he in his rough but well-cut summer suit. The great pagan figure of the Faun towered insolently above them.

The friend was saying, "And have you never felt the appalling loneliness of a crowd?"

"All that," replied Emily, "have I felt, and very much more——"

Then the Faun laid his hands upon them. They, who had only intended a little cultured flirtation, resisted him as long as they could, but were gradually urged into each other's arms, and embraced with passion.

"Miscreant!" I shouted, bursting from the wood. "You have betrayed me."

"I know it: I care not," cried the little friend. "Stand aside. You are in the presence of that which you do not understand. In the great solitude we have found ourselves at last."

"Remove your accursed hands!" I shrieked to the Faun.

He obeyed, and the little friend continued more calmly: "It is idle to chide. What should you know, poor clerical creature, of the mystery of love of the eternal man and the eternal woman, of the self-effectuation of a soul?"

"That is true," said Emily angrily. "Harry, you would never have made me happy. I shall treat you as a friend, but how could I give myself to a man who makes such silly jokes? When you played the buffoon at tea, your hour was sealed. I must be treated seriously: I must see infinities broadening around me as I rise. You may not approve of it, but so I am. In that great solitude I have found myself at last."

"Wretched girl!" I cried. "Great solitude! Oh, pair of helpless puppets——"

The little friend began to lead Emily away, but I heard her whisper to him: "Dear, we can't possibly leave that

basket for Harry after this: and mother's rug; do you mind having that in the other hand?"

So they departed, and I flung myself upon the ground with every appearance of despair.

"Does he cry?" said the Faun.

"He does not cry," answered the hill. "His eyes are as dry as pebbles."

My tormentor made me look at him. "I see happiness at the bottom of your heart," said he.

"I trust I have my secret springs," I answered stiffly. And then I prepared a scathing denunciation, but of all the words I might have said, I only said one and it began with "D."

He gave a joyful cry. "Oh, now you really belong to us. To the end of your life you will swear when you are cross and laugh when you are happy. Now laugh!"

There was a great silence. All nature stood waiting, while a curate tried to conceal his thoughts not only from nature but from himself. I thought of my injured pride, of my baffled unselfishness, of Emily, whom I was losing through no fault of her own, of the little friend, who just then slipped beneath the heavy tea basket, and that decided me, and I laughed.

That evening, for the first time, I heard the chalk downs singing to each other across the valleys, as they often do when the air is quiet and they have had a comfortable day. From my study window I could see the sunlit figure of the Faun, sitting before the beech copse as a man sits before his house. And as night came on I knew for certain that not only was he asleep, but that the hills and woods were asleep also. The stream, of course, never slept, any more than it ever freezes. Indeed, the hour of darkness is really the hour of water, which has been somewhat stifled all day by the great pulsings of the land. That is why you can feel it and hear it

from a greater distance in the night, and why a bath after sundown is most wonderful.

The joy of that first evening is still clear in my memory, in spite of all the happy years that have followed. I remember it when I ascend my pulpit—I have a living now—and look down upon the best people sitting beneath me pew after pew, generous and contented, upon the worst people, crowded in the aisles, upon the whiskered tenors of the choir, and the high-browed curates and the church wardens fingering their bags, and the supercilious vergers who turn late comers from the door. I remember it also when I sit in my comfortable bachelor rectory, amidst the carpet slippers that good young ladies have worked for me, and the oak brackets that have been carved for me by good young men; amidst my phalanx of presentation teapots and my illuminated testimonials and all the other offerings of people who believe that I have given them a helping hand, and who really have helped me out of the mire themselves. And though I try to communicate that joy to others—as I try to communicate anything else that seems good—and though I sometimes succeed, yet I can tell no one exactly how it came to me. For if I breathed one word of that, my present life, so agreeable and profitable, would come to an end, my congregation would depart, and so should I, and instead of being an asset to my parish, I might find myself an expense to the nation. Therefore in the place of the lyrical and rhetorical treatment, so suitable to the subject, so congenial to my profession, I have been forced to use the unworthy medium of a narrative, and to delude you by declaring that this is a short story, suitable for reading in the train.

UNCLE GILES[1]

Dorothy Canfield

There are few personalities which survive the blurring, dimming results of being the subject of family talk through several generations; but the personality of my Great-Uncle Giles has suffered no partial obliteration. It has come down to us with outlines keen and sharply etched into the family consciousness by the acid of exact recollection.

This is not at all because Uncle Giles ever disgraced the family or did any evil or wicked action. Quite the contrary! Uncle Giles thought that he was the only member of the entire tribe with any firmness or distinction of feeling, with any fitness for a higher sphere of activities than the grubby middle-class world of his kinsmen. Yes, that is what Uncle Giles thought, probably adding to himself that he often felt that he was a "gentleman among canaille." To this day the family bristles rise at the mention of anyone who openly professes to be a gentleman.

A gentleman should not be forced to the menial task of earning his living. Uncle Giles was never forced to the menial task of earning his living. None of the coarsely materialistic forces in human life ever succeeded in forcing him to it, not even the combined and violent efforts of a good many able-bodied and energetic kinspeople. The tales of how Uncle Giles blandly outwitted

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their stub-fingered attacks on his liberty and succeeded to the end of a very long life in living without work are endless in number and infinite in variety; and for three generations now have wrought the members of our family to wrath and laughter. He was incredible. You can't imagine anything like him. Unless you have had him in your family too.

For many years Uncle Giles was "preparing for the ministry." These were the candid years when his people did not know him so well as later, and still believed that with a little more help Giles would be able to get on his feet. He was a great favorite in the Theological Seminary where he was a student for so long, a handsome, well-set-up blond young man, with beautiful large blue eyes. I know just how he looked, for we have an expensive miniature of him that was painted at the time. He paid for that miniature with the money my great-grandfather pried out of a Vermont farm. It had been sent to pay for his board. You can't abandon a son just on the point of becoming a clergyman and being a credit to the entire family. Great-grandfather himself had no more money to send at that time, but his other sons, hard-working, energetic, successful men, clubbed together and made up the amount necessary to settle that board bill. Uncle Giles thanked them and forwarded with his letter, to show them, in his own phrase, "that their bounty was not ill-advised," a beautifully bound, high-priced little red morocco note-book in which he had written down the flattering things said of him by his professors and others—especially others. He underlined certain passages, thus: ". . . a very worthy young man, *most pleasing in society.*" "A model to all *in the decorum and grace of his manners.*"

His board bill had to be paid a good many times before Uncle Giles finally gave up preparing himself for the

ministry. The summer vacations of this period he spent in visiting first one and then another member of the family, a first-rate ornament on the front porch and at the table, admired by the ladies of the neighborhood, a prime favorite on picnics and on the croquet ground. He always seemed to have dropped from a higher world into the rough middle-class existence of his kin, but his courtesy was so exquisite that he refrained from commenting on this in any way. Still you could see that he felt it. Especially if you were one of the well-to-do neighbors on whom the distinguished young theological student paid evening calls, you admired his quiet tact and his steady loyalty to his commonplace family.

The effect which his quiet tact and steady loyalty had on his commonplace family was so great that it has persisted undiminished to this day. Any one of us, to the remotest cousin, can spot an Uncle Giles as far as we can see him. We know all about him, and it is not on our front porches that he comes to display his tact and loyalty, and the decorum and grace of his manners. As for allowing the faintest trace of Uncle-Gilesism to color our own lives, there is not one of us who would not rush out to earn his living by breaking stone by the road-side rather than accept even the most genuinely voluntary loan. We are, as Uncle Giles felt, a very commonplace family, of the most ordinary Anglo-Saxon stock, with no illuminating vein of imaginative Irish or Scotch or Welsh blood; and I think it very likely that if we had not experienced Uncle Giles we would have been the stodgiest of the stodgy as far as social injustice is concerned. But our imaginations seem to have been torn open by Uncle Giles as by a charge of dynamite; and, having once understood what he meant, we hang to that comprehension with all our dull Anglo-Saxon tenacity. We have a deep, unfailing sympathy with anyone who is trying to secure a better

and fairer adjustment of burdens in human life, because we see in our plain dull way that what he is trying to do is to eliminate the Uncle Gileses from society and force them to work. And we are always uneasily trying to make sure that we are not in the bigger scheme, without realizing it, Uncle Gilesing it ourselves.

After a while Uncle Giles stopped preparing for the ministry and became an invalid. He bore this affliction with the unaffected manly courage which was always one of his marked characteristics. He never complained: he "bore up" in all circumstances; even in busy wash-days when there was no time to prepare one of the dainty little dishes which the delicacy of his taste enabled him so greatly to appreciate. Uncle Giles always said of the rude, vigorous, hearty, undiscriminating men of the family, that they could "eat anything." His accent in saying this was the wistful one of resigned envy of their health.

It has been a point of honor with us all, ever since, to be able to "eat anything." Anyone, even a legitimate invalid, who is inclined to be fastidious and make it difficult for the others, feels a united family glare concentrating on him, which makes him, in a panic, reach out eagerly for the boiled pork and cabbage.

Uncle Giles's was a singular case, "one of those mysterious maladies which baffle even the wisest physicians," as he used to say himself. A good many ladies in those days had mysterious maladies which baffled even the wisest physicians, and they used to enjoy Uncle Giles above everything. No other man had such an understanding of their symptoms and such sympathy for their sufferings. The easy chair beside Uncle Giles's invalid couch was seldom vacant. Ladies going away after having left a vaseful of flowers for him, and a plateful of cake, and two or three jars of jelly, and some cold breasts of chicken, would say with shining, exalted countenances,

"In spite of his terrible trials, what an inspiration our friend can be. An hour with that good man is like an hour on Pisgah!"

They would, as like as not, make such a remark to the brave invalid's brother or cousin (or, in later years, nephew) who was earning the money to keep the household going. I am afraid we are no longer as a family very sure what or where Pisgah is, although we know it is in the Bible somewhere, but there is a fierce family tradition against fussing over your health which is as vivid this minute as on the day when the brother or cousin or nephew of Uncles Giles turned away with discourteous haste from the shining-faced lady and stamped rudely into another room. Doctors enter our homes for a broken leg or for a confinement, but seldom for anything else.

When the Civil War came on, and Uncle Giles was the only man in the family left at home, he rose splendidly to the occasion and devoted himself to the instruction of his kinswomen, ignorant of the technique of warfare. From his invalid couch he explained to them the strategy of the great battles in which their brothers and husbands and fathers were fighting; and when the letters from hospitals came with news of the wounded, who but Uncle Giles was competent to understand and explain the symptoms reported. As a rule the women of his family were too frantically busy with their Martha-like concentration of the mere material problems of wartime life to give these lucid and intellectual discussions of strategy the attention and consideration they deserved. The war, however, though it seemed endless, lasted after all but four years. And when it was over, Uncle Giles was free to go back to discussions more congenial to his literary and esthetic tastes.

By this time he was past middle-age, "a butterfly broken on the wheel of life," as he said; it was of course out of the question to expect him to think of earning his own living. He had become a family tradition by that time, too, firmly embedded in the solidly set cement of family habits. The older generation always had taken care of him, the younger saw no way out, and with an unsurprised resignation bent their shoulders to carry on. So, before any other plans could be made, Uncle Giles had to be thought of. Vacations were taken seriatim not to leave Uncle Giles alone. In buying or building a house, care had to be taken to have a room suitable for Uncle Giles when it was your turn to entertain him. If the children had the measles, one of the first things to do was to get Uncle Giles into some other home so that he would not be quarantined. That strange law of family life which ordains that the person most difficult to please is always, in the long run, the one to please whom most efforts are made, worked out in its usual complete detail. The dishes Uncle Giles liked were the only ones served (since other men could "eat anything"); the songs Uncle Giles liked were the only ones sung; the houses were adjusted to him; the very color of the rugs and the pictures on the walls were selected to suit Uncle Giles's fine and exacting taste.

Looking back, through the perspective of a generation-and-a-half, I can see the exact point of safely acknowledged middle-age when Uncle Giles's health began cautiously to improve; but it must have been imperceptible to those around him, so gradual was the change. His kin grew used to each successive stage of his recovery before they realized it was there, and nobody seems to have been surprised to have Uncle Giles pass into a remarkably hale and vigorous old age.

"Invalids often are strong in their later years," he said of himself. "It is God's compensation for their earlier sufferings."

He passed into the full rewards of the most rewarded old age. It was a period of apotheosis for him, and a very lengthy one at that, for he lived to be well past eighty. In any gathering Uncle Giles, erect and handsome, specklessly attired, his smooth old face neatly shaved, with a quaint, gentle, old-world courtesy and protecting chivalry in his manner to ladies, was a conspicuous and much-admired figure. People brought their visitors to call on him, and to hear him tell in his vivid, animated way of old times in the country. His great specialty was the Civil War. At any gathering where veterans of the War were to be honored, Uncle Giles held everyone breathless with his descriptions of Gettysburg and Chancellorsville; and when he spoke of Mobile Bay and Sherman's march, how his voice pealed, how his fine eyes lighted up! Strangers used to say to themselves that it was easy to see what an eloquent preacher he must have been when he was in the active ministry. The glum old men in worn blue coats used to gather in a knot in the farthest corner, and in low tones, not to interrupt his discourse, would chat to each other of crops, fishing, and politics.

Somewhere we have a scrapbook in which an ironic cousin of mine carefully pasted in all the newspaper articles that were written about Uncle Giles in his old age, and the many handsome obituary notices which appeared when he finally died. I can remember my father's getting it out occasionally, and reading the clippings to himself with a very grim expression on his face; but it always moved my light-hearted, fun-loving mother to peals of laughter. After all, she was related to Uncle Giles only by marriage and felt no responsibility for him.

The other day, in looking over some old legal papers, I came across a yellowed letter, folded and sealed (as was the habit before envelopes were common) with three handsome pale-blue seals on its back. The seals were made with the crested cameo ring which Uncle Giles always wore, bearing what he insisted was the "coat of arms" of our family. The handwriting of the letter was beautiful, formed with an amorous pride in every letter. It was from Uncle Giles to one of his uncles, my great-grandfather's brother. It had lain there lost for half a century or more, and of course I had never seen it before; but every word of it was familiar to me as I glanced it over. It began in a manner characteristic of Uncle Giles's polished courtesy, with inquiries after every member of his uncle's family, and a pleasant word for each one. He then detailed the state of his health, which, alas, left much to be desired, and seemed, so the doctors told him, to require urgently a summer in the mountains. Leaving this subject, he jumped to the local news of the town where he was then living, and told one or two amusing stories. In one of them I remember was this phrase, "I told her I might be poor, but that a gentleman of good birth did not recognize poverty as a member of the family." Through a neat transition after this he led up again to the subject of his health and to the desirability of his passing some months in the mountains, "in the pure air of God's great hills." Then he entered upon a discreet, pleasant, whimsical reference to the fact that only a contribution from his uncle's purse could make this possible. There never was anybody who could beat Uncle Giles on ease and grace, and pleasant, pungent humor when it came to asking for money. The only person embarrassed in that situation was the one of whom Uncle Giles was expecting the loan.

I read no more. With no conscious volition of mine,

my hand had scrunched the letter into a ball, and my arm, without my bidding, had hurled the ball into the heart of the fire.

But as I reflected on the subject afterwards, and thought of the influence which Uncle Giles has always had on our family, it occurred to me that I was wrong. Uncle Giles ought not to be forgotten. I ought to have saved that letter to show to my children.

THE LEECH[1]

Charles Caldwell Dobie

"I don't fancy that it will be as hot to-morrow," Elizabeth Hewitt said half musingly. "There's a cloud or two in the sky . . . a bit of high fog, I think."

George Hewitt left his iced tea to chill further as he joined his wife at the edge of the porch.

"Well, if it's only fog . . ." his voice trailed off into chilling significance.

She let her glance sweep the cloud-flecked heavens and fall appraisingly upon the continuous lines of treetops sliding down the hillside. Below them stretched the famous prune-orchards of the Santa Clara Valley, miles and miles and again miles of faded greenery seared to a note of yellow by the prolonged drought of a California summer. Upon trays, between the trees, a plum-purple harvest shriveled to blackness under the sun's hot gaze.

"Oh, it simply won't rain!" she insisted. "And, even if it did, the first rain of September never lasts—a mere sprinkle doesn't do any harm. Drying prunes aren't quite that delicate."

He said nothing. She felt sure that her bravado had not convinced him. She wondered whether it had convinced herself, but she had whistled so many times through the graveyard of his anxieties that she had ceased to take account of her own fears.

[1]Reprinted from *The Arrested Moment*, by Charles Caldwell Dobie, by permission of and special arrangement with the author, Harper & Brothers, and the editors of *Harper's Magazine*.

"Do you know," she broke out passionately, "I'm beginning to hate this place. It's—it's taken so much out of us!"

"I've always hated it!" he said, and he went abruptly back to his seat and tinkled the ice in his glass with an air of nervous defiance.

She leaned her head wearily against the iron rod which upheld the gay-striped awning. Like most San Franciscans, reared in the cool lap of a mist-shrouded summer, she detested hot weather. But sunset hour in the Santa Clara Valley brought its compensations. There was always a pageantry about the death of this almost tropical sun which snared her into a complete surrender to its beauty. At such a moment she felt glad, at least, that her father-in-law's dubious legacy was perched upon a height. When everything else failed there was at least a view!

To-night, as usual, the flaming spectacle was hectic instead of wrathful. There were none of the reticences of the seashore landscape to which she was accustomed, shrinking timidly into ocean mists or swallowed up in a maw of smoke-dun clouds flushed to sudden nocturnal anger. Instead, the opposing hills languished behind a veil of palpitant colors, rearing their heads with provocative boldness. The hills, the skies, the plain below, were full of beautiful and cruel subtleties—the subtleties of a magnificence that could be as generous or as niggardly as it fancied. And it struck her that on the surface it was always opulent and alluring.

The first time she had looked down from that height upon the valley it had been snow-white with promise, an unending stretch of satin bloom that held a prophecy of purple harvest. But overnight the blossoming spirit of springtime had been broken utterly by the sharp tooth of a late frost, and yet throughout it all the land had smiled

with the indifference of a princess who could squander as she chose, secure in the knowledge of her inexhaustible treasures. Yes, the land was adorable and impulsive and capricious—it made or broke men as it wished! She turned away from the false allurements of this artfully flushed landscape and she went slowly back to her place at the table. George Hewitt was still tinkling the lump of ice in his tea-glass.

"I don't quite see how you've made it," she began boldly. "I mean the financial grade. . . . I've never spoken of it before because—because—— Well, I've had my fearful moments. I might as well admit that now . . . a man in your position . . ."

"A man in my position?" he echoed craftily.

She colored as she put an apologetic hand on his. "You know what I mean, George. You're in a position of trust and you're surrounded by money—and Heaven knows you've been pushed pretty close to the wall."

He laughed, but she could see that the effort hurt him. "Oh, so that's the idea! Couldn't you grant me at least a little more originality? The trusted bank official turning thief has been rather overdone, don't you think?"

She wished that she had not parried the blow with such a dubious weapon as sarcasm. "But this place has fairly eaten up money," she insisted. "One must have pretty good security even for friends. I've never realized until this past week how worried I've been. I suppose it's the old story—one always collapses within sight of the goal."

"Well," he threw back at her gaily, "it's almost over. In a week every prune on the place will be stewed safely in its own sugar. Unless, of course, it rains!"

She rose impulsively and went over to the railing again. The clouds had vanished, sucked up completely by the warm breath of the shimmering valley.

"It was only fog, after all," she said quietly. And she drew in a long, deep breath.

They both fell silent, partly from a sense of sharp relief and partly from a desire to let the passing day die in mute dignity. It was George Hewitt who first broke the silence.

"What are you looking at?" he asked, quite suddenly.

Her hand dropped from her forehead. "There's a man coming up the road," she answered. "A machine brought him as far as the first bend. I can't make him out."

Her husband had risen; she felt his breath upon her bare neck.

"It looks like Cranston," he said, almost too evenly.

She turned slowly and faced him. "Cranston!" she whispered. "Why, what can *he* want *here?*"

He walked toward the table again. "Something's gone wrong at the office, I guess."

She wondered if her face were pale.

"You'd better go down and help him with his grip," she said, as calmly as she could. "And I'll see about a bite for him. I fancy he hasn't had dinner."

"He's very fond of wine," Hewitt suggested significantly.

"I'll see that he has a bottle," she answered, but her voice had a chilling brevity.

Her husband threw her a grateful glance. "I want him to be comfortable . . . you understand . . . *as comfortable as we can make him!*"

She had never liked Cranston, a little, prying man with faded red hair and a clerical stoop, and she liked him less now, sitting at her al fresco table and smacking his thin lips over the wine. She could not help wondering why her husband had ever picked him for an assistant.

"You've a nice place here," he was saying with a fine air of patronage as she cleared away his empty dinner-plate and set a dish of frozen peaches before him.

"Yes," she replied, "but we're tired of it. A place like this means money and thought and worry. And this is the first good year we've had. Prunes, you know, are nearly fourteen cents a pound."

"So I was told. I got to talking with a man on the train. People don't seem to have anything else on their minds in this section."

She made no reply, but he continued to chatter, throwing out covert inferences—about prices, and labor difficulties, and markets, and the chances of rain. Yes, it seemed that he had weighed even this last possibility to the final fraction. He had been talking to people, with a vengeance.

At last her husband stirred. "Oh, I'm not particularly worried about rain, now," she heard him lie defensively as she went back into the house for black coffee. "September is a pretty safe month."

She halted at the threshold to catch Cranston's reply: "But they tell me that once it rained for a solid week. And even with the trays all stacked, the prunes mildewed. Moist, warm air is always dangerous."

"Well . . . if that happens this year . . . I'm ruined, that's all!"

Cranston said nothing, but he made significant and greedy noises over his dish of frozen peaches. Elizabeth Hewitt continued her movements into the house. They were lighting cigars when she got back.

"I've been telling Hewitt he looks fagged," Cranston said.

The light of a sputtering match at the tip of Hewitt's cigar emphatically confirmed the statement.

Elizabeth drew away into the shadow where she could

give her rancor scope without betraying the full measure of her scorn.

"My husband *is* fagged," she retorted, with deceitful coolness. "He needs a good long rest. And, of course, *this* isn't any vacation—running down here for two weeks with all the anxieties and worries of watching prunes convert themselves into dollars. . . . And you people there at the bank, you know how things are . . . well, I should think you'd spare him all you could, and not come bothering him with bond and mortgage problems. If he had gone away fishing in the wilderness you couldn't have found him. But here, of course——"

"Yes, you're quite right," Cranston agreed, with a shade of banter. "I've been urging him for five years to take a vacation, a real vacation. But doubtless he has his reasons, Mrs. Hewitt."

Hewitt laughed harshly. "Why put it in the plural form, Cranston?"

The assistant stared. "You always were a stickler for details," he burst out finally. And the two laughed in unison.

She did not know just what to do. The obvious thing was to excuse herself and leave them together with their business problems. But a curious reluctance urged her to stay. She had an absurd feeling that she would like to stand forever between these two, and, in a fantastical flash, she pictured the years rolling on and on while she continued to balk any exchange of their confidences by her cooly stubborn presence. . . . The air was growing chilly as it does so often in the California country within range of the sea's nocturnal breath. A few more wisps of fog were laying their cool bodies against the warm bosom of the hills.

"Suppose we go inside," she suggested.

The two men rose and stood facing each other. She

passed between them. When she looked back she saw that they were following slowly and that Cranston's arm was locked tightly in the arm of her husband. She felt a renewed distrust, almost a loathing, for her visitor's intrusive presence. It was not possible, she reflected, for George Hewitt to have any affection for this man, and he had never yet been at a loss to keep at bay advances which he found distasteful or inexpedient.

She switched on the lights, arranged the newspapers which were scattered over the rug by her husband's chair, shut out a sharp draft of air from an adjoining room with a quick drawing together of draperies. The men sat down, settling themselves comfortably.

An impulse to retire fluttered and died. She went to the piano.

"What shall I play?" she asked, almost gayly.

It was her husband who replied, and his voice sounded far away:

"If you don't mind, my dear, Cranston and I have a lot of tiresome things to talk over . . . another night—there'll be plenty of time for music—later!"

She felt suddenly as if a door had been closed in her face, and she had all the indignation of one put to the test of such an affront. She would not leave him alone with that man! She would *not!*

"Why," she pouted, "Mr. Cranston will be running away to-morrow. . . . I know these bankers—they never have time for anything but money-grubbing!"

She had meant to be insulting and she knew that her shaft had struck home, but Cranston shielded his feelings behind a crafty smile.

"And what if I stayed for a week or two—just to disprove your statement, my dear Mrs. Hewitt? I'm anxious to see a prune crop safely harvested."

So that was it—he proposed staying, and he did not

even intend to wait for an invitation! She rose from the piano shrugging her shoulders, and walked to the door without a word. At the threshold she hesitated. A sense of helplessness came over her. She was sure that her husband needed her, and yet there was nothing to do but leave the room. She waited for some sign from him, halting for the briefest fraction of a second, which seemed to her eternity. He cleared his throat, but nothing further came of it. She passed on, out into the night. The chill seemed welcome to her now.

She crossed the porch and glided down the steps, throwing her spangled after-dinner scarf about her dark hair. Little puffs of warm air came up caressingly from the tawny ground. Before her, row upon row, stretched the quiescent trees, bent and broken and seared by the weakening burden of fruition. Between them, upon the drying trays, lay the purple yield that mellow springtime had spawned and thick-breathed summer had swaddled to perfect consummation.

"It's almost over," she said to herself, consciously repeating her husband's words.

But the thought no longer thrilled her. What was the use in feasting if a ghost were to sit forever at their table? She did not mind sharing her husband's virtues with another, but his shortcoming . . . She stopped short. What was she thinking of?

The wind veered suddenly.

"It's from the south!" flashed through her mind. "Suppose it should rain, after all?"

And it struck her that she felt curiously undisturbed at this possibility. She went around by a devious path and climbed the back stairs to her bedroom.

She sat in the darkness, by an open window, thinking —reviewing the history of these past five years. How

well she remembered the satisfaction with which she had met the news that her father-in-law's prune orchard was to be their portion! A country place within motoring distance of town! How smart it had all sounded! But her husband had not shared her enthusiasm.

"A pretty expensive luxury!" he had replied grimly.

But she had refused to be daunted, even with the story of Hewitt senior's failure ringing in her ears. He had been an old man, of course, and too conservative. And he had been bitten unconsciously by the old-fashioned theory that the land's yield was in the hands of Fate. Furthermore, he didn't know how to market his product to advantage. In short, he played the part of country gentleman with perfect consistence, even to the inevitable detail of a steadily encroaching mortgage.

Of course her husband would change all that! He was a man of affairs, and could command money in a crisis. There was really no reason why, in addition to having a delightful summer home, they should not increase their income. Thus had Elizabeth Hewitt reasoned from her comfortable position on the side-lines. Participating in the game was different. She came to think, in due season, that such ventures *were* in the lap of the gods, after all. The first year had come a frost, and the second a drying wind at just the wrong season. Again, a prolonged drought had reduced the crop to a shadow. Finally, the bottom had dropped out of the market, and the returns from a good yield had barely paid for the harvesting. And all the time the sloping hillside sucked up money like a greedy mistress who lured with false promises and mockingly withheld her favors.

Owning a country place was not a delight, but a responsibility, and all through the long, hot, palpitant summer Elizabeth Hewitt found herself chained to a rock of petty cares and worries and details, while George slaved in

town for wherewithal to pour into the insatiable maw of this relentless enterprise. Not that his earnings could satisfy the demands upon him! The salary of a bank cashier might be almost opulent as other salaries went, but it had small place in stemming the tide of a horticultural disaster. At first it had all been very poetic—the snow-white springtime of blossoming, the green-gold summer of swelling fruit, the wine-purple autumn of consummation. From bud to final ripening, the prim, slender trees had revealed the seasons colorfully and with fragrant symbols. And in the richness of these dew-starred pageantries Elizabeth Hewitt sometimes forgot to regret the shallower delights in which her first hopes had indulged. But presently this procession from bloom to fruition became blurred by the mists of an ever-increasing anxiety. She began to feel a disquiet at the circumstance that had once reassured her—at the fact that her husband *was* a man of affairs and could command money in a crisis. It bore in upon her that a man lacking easy access to capital might have been less tempted to prolong the agony. At the beginning, she had known the sources of supply—an expansion of the first mortgage, the profit from a quick sale of an active stock, the grudging help from a reluctant relation, a friendly boost or two. But, as time went on, his financial course became blurred and finally lost in a series of quick turns and evasions. She remembered the chill that had swept her on that day when in answer to her usual frank questions about finances he had replied curtly:

"I've managed to arrange things for a while longer . . . you needn't worry."

Later when she had pressed him, tactfully, though a bit tremulously, he had been less sharp but quite as unyielding:

"Don't think about it. . . . I'll pull through somehow."

You needn't worry! Don't think about it! Did a man fancy that anxiety and fear and loyalty were subject to command? That the blossoms of peace and contentment could flourish in the dark?

Presently she ceased to prod him, and when that moment came she had a sick realization that something had died within her. Could it be that her flame of faith had been blown out?

This year she had followed the usual seasonal progressions, parted-lipped, every nerve strained to anxious attention. Bud, blossom, harvest—she had hung upon each successful unfolding until her very senses ached with the tautness of concentration. As late as yesterday the victory had seemed assured.

She rose from her place before the open window. It was long past midnight. She thrust her hand out into the night. The wind had died. Anything might be possible—a swift downpour or an equally sharp clear-up of the threatening clouds.

She went to the door and opened it, listening. The low rumble of voices came to her. George Hewitt's clipped laugh, the acrid pungency of stale tobacco. Why didn't they break up and come to bed?

She stepped back from the threshold and closed the door. Presently she began to undress. She was braiding her hair when she heard the tramp of feet coming up the stairs. She tried to be calm, but her husband's nearness was disturbing.

When he came into the room she pretended to be very busy with the thick black strand of hair in her hand. Sitting before her dressing-table mirror, she caught glimpses of his face. She was not reassured.

"Well," she yawned at last, "I'm glad you've decided to turn in. Mr. Cranston will bless us as it is—in the morning—when his alarm goes off!"

He did not reply at once. "His alarm won't be going off," he answered, throwing aside his collar.

She tossed her braid backward with a quick gesture. "You mean he really intends to stay—*here?*"

"Yes," he flung out sharply. "Is there anything so extraordinary in that?"

She leaned close to the mirror, drawing her upraised forefinger across her eyebrows. "I didn't know it was policy for two people from the same department to be away from a bank. . . . How long is he going to stay?"

He frowned savagely. "A week—maybe two."

She rose and faced him. "In other words, he intends to see the prunes safely harvested. Just what is Cranston's interest in *our* crop?"

She had never questioned him defiantly before and she could see that her attitude had confused him. He was off guard and unprepared.

"I know he hasn't any money," she went on relentlessly, "so he can't have any personal financial interest. And I also know that a banking institution doesn't lend to its employees, so he can't be here in the interest of the firm. But I do know one thing—he's not staying for pleasure!"

He made a weary gesture as he leaned against the chiffonier. "Do you really want me to tell you?" he demanded.

Her hands fell from their folded position on her breast. For a moment she stood inactive, gripped with the sudden terror of an impending flash that she knew would blind her.

"No," she answered weakly, "perhaps you'd better not."

She turned and sank down in her seat before the dressing table, and she made a pretense of drawing her ivory comb through her imprisoned hair.

He went to the window; he threw it higher. A keen current of air stirred a spent rose upon the casement to swift showering.

"It's clearing up," he cried out buoyantly. "The wind's from the north!"

She let the comb drop from her fingers and she buried her face in her hands. Presently she felt his nearness—he was infolding her with a gracious tenderness.

"Come . . . come . . ." he urged. "Bear up a little longer. I know it's hard. . . . But, just think, in a week at the most, everything will be over. You're not displeased, are you . . . at . . . at anything I've done?"

She drew his arms closer. "Displeased? No, it isn't that. But you've shut me out so long I've lost courage."

He put his lips to her hair. "There . . . there . . . You needn't worry! Don't think about it!"

She released herself slowly. "I'm beyond worrying, *now!*" she said distinctly.

The morning broke clear and cloudless. The effect of the potential rain-storm had been almost as complete as if a sullen torrent had descended to wash the air clean of its dust-golden haze. Elizabeth laid the breakfast-table out in the open, upon the porch, in spite of the air's fresh tang.

Cranston and her husband came down together, arm in arm. Elizabeth gave them a swift sidelong glance and almost at that moment she saw George Hewitt disentangle himself from his friend's proprietary embrace. She put slices of melon at each place, humming audibly. The men sat down. Cranston fell upon the cool crescent of melon in front of him, smacking his lips. Already Elizabeth Hewitt was growing accustomed to that audible sound of satisfaction. It was extraordinary how much vitality seemed to express itself in these thin, pale, secret-

ive lips snared to sudden and almost ugly revelations by gastronomic delights.

"It must have been a great relief," Cranston ventured affably, "for you people to wake up this morning and find the sun shining."

Elizabeth seated herself opposite him and began to pour the coffee. "Oh, I'm not sure that I care one way or the other," she drawled with palpable affectation. "We've experienced every disaster but an untimely rain at the drying season . . . and—well, I'm furious to discover just what the last straw will be."

Cranston dug greedily into his melon. "Well, I guess *any* streak of bad luck would prove the last straw this year, eh, George?"

She flashed a swift glance at her husband; he dropped his eyes.

"There's such a thing as a choice of evils," she said coolly, transferring her steady glance to Cranston.

He gave an odd chuckling snort and deliberately unbuttoned his vest.

Would he take off his coat, next, she wondered. And how long before he would be slopping about her house in straw slippers? She could have stood such arrogance from a physically vital personality, but somehow this man's pallid insolence seemed an unbearable affront. The Chinese cook brought on shirred eggs and crisp, pungent bacon and thin slices of buttered toast.

"Gad! but you live well!" escaped Cranston enthusiastically, and the smacking of his bloodless lips began again.

Hewitt, picking at bacon, read the paper between gulps of coffee. Elizabeth fell silent.

Presently the meal was finished and Hewitt rose, flinging his newspaper to the ground.

"Well, I'm off!" he announced. "Want to come with me, Cranston, and look the place over?"

Cranston stretched himself comfortably, and glanced through a rift in the awning at the blue sky. "No, I don't think I'll move about much to-day. It's going to be hot later on. I'll just stay here and chin with the missus."

An incredulous stare briefly escaped Hewitt. Cranston began to roll a cigarette.

Elizabeth pushed back her chair. Cranston's words had a casual tone, but she fancied that she could sense a distinctly malevolent ring beneath the surface. Should she rise and go with her husband or should she stay and face the music? It almost seemed as if George Hewitt had read her thought, for he said, very coldly:

"Perhaps Mrs. Hewitt has other plans."

"Well . . ." stammered Cranston, put out for the moment by Hewitt's brusqueness, "in that case . . ."

Elizabeth folded her napkin with slow precision. "No," she said finally. "I think I'll stay here and listen to Mr. Cranston. I'm sure he must be an entertaining talker."

They were silent for a season. Cranston was busy with his evil-smelling cigarette and Elizabeth was shrouded in deep speculation. Was her apprehension investing the man before her with sinister values out of all proportion to any reality? she asked herself. Superficially, he seemed pallid enough, and perhaps his very neutrality gave her the power to stamp every trivial act of his into a confirmation of her fears. But she had to confess, as she watched him sprawling in perfect physical content over his morning smoke, that he impressed her as a man whose very shallowness was disturbing—he had none of the suavities of either real power or under-

standing. She withdrew to the mechanical diversion of drumming idly upon the blue-and-white breakfast cloth, and suddenly, with a directness that surprised even herself, she broke out:

"What is it that you want to say to me, Mr. Cranston?"

He tossed away the spent cigarette stub. "I don't think, Mrs. Hewitt," he began confidentially, "that you quite realize how deeply your husband is involved. A mere financial disaster would be serious enough, but as it is . . ."

She was calm. "You mean that he's been forced into something not quite . . ."

"Precisely."

She felt no emotion save a withering scorn for the man opposite her.

"How long have you known?" she demanded.

"For about two days. . . . I ran into the thing quite by accident. . . . Of course I came down here as soon as I could arrange things without exciting suspicion. . . . I pleaded an impending nervous breakdown. I felt sure it would be well for me to stick close to Hewitt until . . . until everything was over. One never knows what a man will do under such circumstances. . . . Of course, you realize I'm still loyal, still his friend in spite of everything. . . . Most people wouldn't take that view of it, I know, but *I'm* different! . . . After all, what is a little moral lapse between friends? And if what he tells me is true, the crop this year will more than make good the defalcation."

"And if something should happen?"

"In that case . . . Well, you couldn't expect me to keep this affair quiet forever, Mrs. Hewitt, could you now? . . . And then I'm not sure that he would stand the strain of another season. . . . It's very unfortunate . . . and I'm sorry for *you,* Mrs. Hewitt, indeed I am."

She could have stood everything from him except this last smug commiseration. "Why should you feel sorry for me?" burst from her as she rose to her feet. "I'm sure I haven't asked for your sympathy!"

He gave a self-satisfied laugh. "I don't blame you for having pride. Fact is, I admire that quality in a woman. . . . Naturally, you're bowled over for the moment at the news. . . . I understand how you feel."

She drew back scornfully: *"News? . . .* I hope you don't think you've told me anything I didn't know!"

"Do you mean to say that he . . .?"

"There are some things that women don't have to be told, Mr. Cranston. . . ."

He refused to be disturbed by either her manner or her revelations. Instead he rolled another cigarette with irritating satisfaction.

"Well," he began pompously, "I'm glad you knew. It eases my conscience. . . . I wanted to do the right thing by George, and after seeing you here at close range I felt sure that you ought to know the situation. But such a question isn't easy to decide. As it turns out, it wouldn't have mattered whether I spoke or was silent. But at least you have one satisfaction. You know I'm your friend. . . . Don't worry! With the help of the weather, you and I will pull him through, Mrs. Hewitt! You can depend on *me!"*

She sat down suddenly and her peals of laughter rippled the still morning air. "Excuse me, but you don't know how funny you are, Mr. Cranston!"

He shifted about now, a bit uneasily. She stopped laughing.

"He would have understood tears!" flashed through her mind.

And she began to laugh again, glad to find some weapon that could pierce his hitherto impervious self-satisfaction.

She waited until one-thirty for her husband to come in to his midday meal, and then she decided to carry it through without his presence. Cranston was worried, she could see that, but he was cautious in expressing his anxiety. Apparently he had not recovered from the shock of her morning laughter; she still puzzled him to the point of confusion. But he did gather the courage to say finally:

"Doesn't George usually come in to lunch?"

She passed him a plate of crisp salad. "Not always," she lied blandly.

"I hope," he ventured, "that . . . that nothing has happened."

She closed her eyes for a swift moment. "Nonsense," she threw back with a defiance that would have betrayed itself to a more subtle audience.

He fell upon his salad with a crunching sound that made her shiver. Was the balance of her days to be spent in listening to this man eat? she asked herself. She felt that if she were to live forever she would always recall this visit of Cranston's as a continuous and audible feast.

"I really ought not to have let him go about this morning . . . alone!" he insisted, between mouthfuls. "A man under *his* strain needs companionship."

She knew what he was thinking; in fact, the same idea had suggested itself to her as she was freshening up for luncheon. At that moment she had crossed over deliberately to her husband's chiffonier, and, with her hands upraised, she had dared herself to pull open the top drawer and see whether his pistol was in its accustomed place. At the crucial moment she had weakened; she had decided *not* to look.

In spite of the sick disquiet which the memory of her cowardice evoked, she found a delicious irony in the spec-

tacle of this hunter apprehensive as to his quarry. Like all leeches, he needed a virile body upon which to feed —a dead George Hewitt would not serve his purpose. The man before her was many times and in many ways an ignorant fool, but he had instinctive impulses which guided unerringly, and he had made no mistake in ranging himself upon her husband's side. The rôle of informer would place him at best in a position of transient glory, but, as confidential friend and savior, he had his future by the heel. From this moment on Cranston would rise or fall upon the fortunes of his superior.

"With the help of the weather, you and I will put him through, Mrs. Hewitt. You can depend on *me!*" His complacent words of early morning came to her mind. Did he feel as confident now, as smugly sure, that the only enemy to his rising fortunes was the weather? She knew that he must be cursing his carelessness, chaffing inwardly at the impulses which had persuaded him that an after-breakfast chat with her had been worth the risk of giving his victim any rope.

She would not have found a professional blackmailer so disturbing. After all, such men usually had a definite price. They named the sum that would buy their silence and there was a fair chance that one heard no more of them. But this man was trading upon their gratitude and it was plain that he expected the store to be inexhaustible. To the end of their days they must smile upon him, suffer his patronizing handclasp, convert themselves into tufted footstools for his rough-shod arrogance, become the ladder upon which his mediocrity would climb to otherwise unattainable heights. And he would not even temper the situation with the grace of either tact or understanding! A slight tremor ran through her. She picked up her fork and made a pretense of eating.

She had been acting this morning when she had inti-

mated that an inopportune trick of weather might be less disturbing than some other shift of fortune. She realized now that, while such a circumstance would accomplish its end swiftly, it would be scarcely a vindication of her husband's courage! Yes, courage was always left, even though honor had flown. The thought beguiled her. It was curious to discover the solaces that one could wring from disaster, the fresh point of view glimpsed from the last position that one fell back upon, in an attempt to stem the tide of utter defeat! What if her husband had still enough courage to outwit self-contempt and the man before her in one swift flight? Cranston, she felt, had acknowledged one more sinister possibility to the chances against establishing for himself a secure foothold upon the ledge of fortune. The weather and a gleaming pistol—either of these agents could destroy his hopes. But did he have the vision to include the third contingency which was flashing so luminously across her black anxiety? . . . No, she felt sure that he did not.

He finished his meal rapidly, but he slighted nothing in either his haste or his uneasiness.

"I think," he said, as he pushed back his chair, "that I'll take a look about the place, after all. It's cooler and perhaps I'll run into George!"

She went to the foot of the steps with him. It *was* cooler, and, as her gaze swept the distant hills, she discovered that a gray film was being drawn across the blue face of the sky. The air was moving restlessly in little aimless gusts, and yellow leaves from the exhausted prune-trees danced in the screened sunlight.

"They ought to be stacking the trays," flashed through her mind.

Cranston's figure disappeared, merging itself into the converging foliage of the orchard. She went into the house and up to her bedroom. This time she did not hesi-

tate—she crossed to her husband's chiffonier and pulled open the upper drawer. . . . *His pistol was not there!*

She wondered afterwards how it had been possible for her to sit quietly all that sultry afternoon, waiting for her husband's familiar step upon the stairway, but there had seemed little else to be done. She was not a woman who expressed her concern in physical restlessness, and her seemingly tranquil moments were often her darkest.

She blamed herself a thousand times and in a thousand different ways. Why had she allowed her cowardice to thwart his confidence last night? Wouldn't it have been better to have heard the truth from *him* rather than from Cranston? A word from her might have saved him, while now . . . But she put the very suggestion away with a sharp thrust. The fact that he had succumbed to temptation no longer disturbed her—she had greater hopes and fears for him. She had lost many vague and tremulous ideals along the pathway of reality, but her step was surer and her gaze accustomed to the relentless glare of a spiritual noonday. She felt a responsibility, a sense that in the final analysis her husband would become what she had helped to make him—that only an incorrigible remained impervious to environment and association. And her thoughts flew back swiftly to the day when she had been pleased with her father-in-law's legacy merely because it seemed smart to have a summer place within motoring distance from town. She had wanted it for display more than anything else, snared by the empty grandeur of possession. . . . Well, it had ended by taking them both captive.

When, finally, she did hear the familiar footsteps, she closed her eyes and clutched the arms of her chair. He came into the room cautiously. She could not trust herself to rise and greet him.

"Ah, so there you are!' he said inadequately, and he

went to his chiffonier and stood before it awkwardly, combing out his hair. . . . Presently he opened the upper drawer and she saw him put the pistol back. He turned and faced her. She rose.

"I knew you wouldn't do it!" she said, and her voice quivered.

He kept his place, leaning back with a suggestion of exhaustion.

"Where's Cranston?" he demanded.

"Out looking for you. . . . He's been nervous."

"Naturally," he laughed back harshly. "He told you, of course . . . but I guess it wasn't really news. . . . I've been figuring things out this afternoon. . . . I'm in pretty bad, but not bad enough to buy my safety at *his* price—unless you would rather have it so."

She felt the sudden glow of a warm relief. She went up to him and she took his face between her trembling hands.

He put her from him gently. "Don't!" he entreated. "I mustn't break down now. If you'll find me my overcoat and a decent collar and tie . . . I want to get away before he comes in."

She bustled about, gathering his things, while he freshened up. It was curious how all these trivial commonplaces relieved the strain.

Finally he was ready. She had never seen him look so well, she thought. At the door he infolded her, and she clung for a moment, inert but tearless.

"You realize," he said, "what this *may* mean? I'm hoping that with fair prospects they'll let me make good —and then resign. On the other hand . . ."

She looked into his eyes with a clear, steady gaze.

"Nothing matters but just this . . . to know you had the courage to go to them . . . *alone!* Remember that . . . *always* . . . no matter what happens!"

He answered with a swift, passionate embrace.

"To-morrow, if it still looks threatening, have them stack the trays. Everything depends on the crop now."

"Yes . . . yes . . ."

"And make any excuses you think best to Cranston. . . . To-morrow you can tell him what I have done. . . . I'll be back as soon as they'll let me."

He had gone and she stood, wilting for a moment, in the doorway. The flapping of a curtain claimed her attention. She crossed over, thrusting it up sharply. The wind struck her face with cool refreshment and played wantonly with her hair.

"From the south again," she muttered, shivering slightly. She shut the window decisively and threw herself upon the bed. "I'll have to get them at work early to-morrow, stacking trays. We can't afford to take any chances."

She wondered what Cranston was doing at that moment, and a droll picture of him running about the orchard, like an anxious setter sniffing for game to no purpose, rose before her, moving her to inward laughter. She thought with a sharp gasp of satisfaction that, no matter what happened, to-night would be the last time she would be compelled to share her loaf with the man she detested. And she had a sudden sense of the sincerity and fairness in the Eastern custom that denied an enemy bread and salt. Well, she would play the game according to Western standards and provide him a good meal. . . . She closed her eyes, thinking over the fare that she would set before him, picking out all the things that would bring the greedy and audible smack to his lips. Yes . . . she wanted to move him to all his irritating tricks so that she could measure the depths of their escape. She would have a piquant soup and a crisp salad again and chicken

broiled to a turn. And for dessert . . . something cool and juicy. Had she better serve another melon or would he find a crushed and frozen fruit more to his taste? . . . How about prune whip? Of course, just the thing . . . so appropriate . . . and . . . and . . . My, but she was growing drowsy! . . . Prune whip . . . Well, she had better rouse herself and tell . . . the cook. . . . Yes, in just a minute . . . just a min— . . . Prune whip. . . . What a . . .

She awoke with a sense of stifled confusion. It was dark, and somebody was tapping on her door. She flung herself to her feet and switched on the light.

"Come in!" she called boldly.

The door flew back. Cranston stood before her at the threshold. He had on his overcoat and his hat and traveling-bag were in his hand.

"I'm very sorry, Mrs. Hewitt," he began awkwardly. "But I've decided to catch the next train."

"Going? . . . without *dinner?*" she gasped.

"Yes," he spit out brutally. "It's raining!"

She could hear it now, flinging itself in an angry torrent against the pane, but she refused to surrender.

"Rain?" she echoed. "Why, it's only a shower. . . . In a few moments——"

"Nonsense!" he retorted bitterly. "It's been coming down for over an hour. Everybody says it will last all night! Your husband is a fool, Mrs. Hewitt; he ought to have been stacking the trays to-day!"

He was turning from her with a gesture of impatient contempt. She roused herself suddenly, drawing up to her full height. She was not exactly a happy woman, but at that moment she knew what it was to be a proud one.

"You might as well stay, Mr. Cranston," she said

distinctly, "and *eat*. My husband is already in San Francisco."

He put his hat on his head and pulled it over his eyes. "A confession won't get him anything now!" he growled viciously. "He's done for.... Big business isn't tenderhearted with paupers!"

She stood motionless, pressing her cold fingers against her throbbing temples. She heard him go down the stairs and out into the night, banging the door. . . . She felt an enormous relief.

THE MOB FROM MASSAC[1]

IRVIN S. COBB

YOU might call it a tragedy—this thing that came to pass down in our country here a few years back. For that was exactly what it was—a tragedy, and in its way a big one. Yet at the time nobody thought of calling it by any name at all. It was just one of those shifts that are inevitably bound to occur in the local politics of a county or a district; and when it did come, and was through and over with, most people accepted it as a matter of course.

There were some, however, it left jarred and dazed and bewildered—yes, and helpless too; men too old to readjust their altered fortunes to their altered conditions even if they had the spirit to try, which they hadn't. Take old Major J. Q. A. Pickett now. Attaching himself firmly to a certain spot at the far end of Sherrill's bar, with one leg hooked up over the brass bar-rail—a leg providentially foreshortened by a Minie ball at Shiloh, as if for that very purpose—the major expeditiously drank himself to death in a little less than four years, which was an exceedingly short time for the job, seeing he had always been a most hale and hearty old person, though grown a bit gnarly and skewed with the coming on of age. The major had been county clerk ever since Reconstruction; he was a gentleman and a scholar and could quote Latin and Sir Walter Scott's poetry by the running yard. Toward the last he quoted them with hiccups and a stutter.

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Also there was Captain Andy J. Redcliffe, who was sheriff three times handrunning and, before that, chief of police. Going out of office he went into the livery-stable business; but he didn't seem to make much headway against the Farrell Brothers, who owned the other livery stable and were younger men and spry and alert to get trade. He spent a few months sitting at the front door of his yawning, half-empty stables, nursing a grudge against nearly everything and plaintively garrulous on the subject of the ingratitude of republics in general and this republic in particular; and presently he sickened of one of those mysterious diseases that seem to attack elderly men of a full habit of life and to rob them of their health without denuding them of their flesh. His fat sagged on his bones in unwholesome, bloated folds and he wallowed unsteadily when he walked. One morning one of his stable hands found him dead in his office, and the Gideon K. Irons Camp turned out and gave him a comrade's funeral, with full military honors.

Also there were two or three others, including ex-County Treasurer Whitford, who shot himself through the head when a busy and conscientious successor found in his accounts a seeming shortage of four hundred and eighty dollars, which afterwards turned out to be more a mistake in bookkeeping than anything else. Yet these men—all of them—might have seen what was coming had they watched. The storm that wrecked them was a long time making up—four years before it had threatened them.

There had grown up a younger generation of men who complained—and perhaps they had reason for the complaint—that they did nearly all the work of organizing and campaigning and furnished most of the votes to carry the elections, while a close combine of aging, fussy, autocratic old men held all the good county offices and fatted themselves on the spoils of county politics. These mut-

terings of discontent found shape in a sort of semi-organized revolt against the county ring, as the young fellows took to calling it, and for the county primary they made up a strong ticket among themselves—a ticket that included two smart young lawyers who could talk on their feet, and a popular young farmer for sheriff, and a live young harnessmaker as a representative of union labor, which was beginning to be a recognized force in the community with the coming of the two big tanneries. They made a hard fight of it, too, campaigning at every fork in the big road and every country store and blacksmith shop, and spouting arguments and oratory like so many inspired human spigots. Their elderly opponents took things easier. They rode about in top buggies and democrat wagons from barbecue to rally and from rally to schoolhouse meetings, steadfastly refusing the challenges of the younger men for a series of joint debates and contenting themselves with talking over old days with fading, grizzled men of their own generation. These elders, in turn, talked with their sons and sons-in-law and their nephews and neighbors; and so, when the primaries came, the young men's ticket stood beaten—but not by any big margin. It was close enough to be very close.

"Well, they've licked us this time!" said Dabney Prentiss, who afterwards went to Congress from the district and made a brilliant record there. Dabney Prentiss had been the younger element's candidate for circuit-court judge against old Judge Priest. "They've licked us and the Lord only knows how they did it. Here we thought we had 'em outorganized, outgeneraled, and outnumbered. All they did was to go out in the back district and beat the bushes, and out crawled a lot of old men that everybody else thought were dead twenty years ago. I think they must hide under logs in the woods and only come out to vote. But, fellows"—he was addressing some of

his companions in disappointment—"but, fellows, we can afford to wait and they can't. The day is going to come when it'll take something more than shaking an empty sleeve or waving a crippled old leg to carry an election in this country. Young men keep growing up all the time, but all that old men can do is to die off. Four years from now we'll win sure!"

The four years went by, creakingly slow of passage to some and rolling fast to others; and in the summer of the fourth year another campaign started up and grew hot and hotter to match the weather, which was blazing hot. The August drought came, an arid and a blistering visitation. Except at dusk and at dawn the birds quit singing and hung about in the thick treetops, silent and nervous, with their bills agape and their throat feathers panting up and down. The roasting ears burned to death on the stalk and the wide fodder blades slowly cooked from sappy greenness to a brittle dead brown. The clods in the cornrows were dry as powder and gave no nourishment for growing, ripening things. The dust powdered the blackberry vines until they lost their original color altogether, and at the roadside the medicinal mullein dropped its wilted long leaves, like lolling tongues that were all furred and roiled, as though the mullein suffered from the very fevers that its steeped juices are presumed to cure. At its full the moon shone hot and red, with two rings round it; and the two rings always used to mean water in our country—two rings for drinking water at the hotel, and for rainwater two rings round the moon —but week after week no rain fell and the face of the earth just seemed to dry up and blow away. Yet the campaign neither lost its edge nor abated any of its fervor by reason of the weather. Politics was the chief diversion and the main excitement in our county in those days —and still is.

One morning near the end of the month a dust-covered man on a sorely spent horse galloped in from Massac Creek, down in the far edge of the county; and when he had changed horses at Farrell Brothers' and started back again there went with him the sheriff, both of his deputies, and two of the town policemen, the sheriff taking with him in his buckboard a pair of preternaturally grave dogs of a reddish-brown aspect, with long, drooping ears, and long, sad, stupid faces and eyes like the chief mourners' at a funeral. They were bloodhounds, imported at some cost from a kennel in Tennessee and reputed to be marvelously wise in the tracking down of criminals. By the time the posse was a mile away and headed for Massac a story had spread through the town that made men grit their teeth and sent certain armed and mounted volunteers hurrying out to join the manhunt.

Late that same afternoon a team of blown horses, wet as though they had wallowed in the river and drawing a top buggy, panted up to the little red-brick jail, which stood on the county square alongside the old wooden white courthouse, and halted there. Two men—a constable and a deputy sheriff—sat back under the overhanging top of the buggy, and between them something small was crushed, huddled down on the seat and almost hidden by their broad figures. They were both yellowed with the dust of a hard drive. It lay on their shoulders like powdered sulphur and was gummed to their eyelashes, so that when they batted their eyelids to clear their sight it gave them a grotesque, clownish look. They climbed laboriously out and stretched their limbs.

The constable hurried stiffly up the short gravel path to the jail and rapped on the door and called out something. The deputy sheriff reached in under the buggy top and hauled out a little negro, skinny and slight and seemingly not over eighteen years old. He hauled him

out as though he was handling a sack of grits, and the negro came out like a sack of grits and fell upon his face on the pavement, almost between the buggy wheels. His wrists were held together by a pair of iron handcuffs heavy enough to fetter a bear, and for further precaution his legs had been hobbled with a plowline, and his arms were tied back with another length of the plowline that passed through his elbows and was knotted behind. The deputy stooped, took a grip on the rope across the prisoner's back and heaved him up to his feet. He was ragged, barefooted and bareheaded, and his face was covered with a streaky clayish-yellow caking, where the sweat had run down and wetted the dust layers. Through this muddy mask his pop-eyes stared with a dulled animal terror.

Thus yanked upright the little negro swayed on his feet, shrinking up his shoulders and lurching in his tethers. Then his glazed stare fell on the barred windows and the hooded door of the jail, and he realized where he had been brought and hurried toward it as toward a welcome haven, stretching his legs as far as the ropes sawing on his naked ankles would let him. Willing as he was, however, he collapsed altogether as he reached the door and lay on his face kinking and twisting up in his bonds like a stricken thing. The deputy and the constable dragged him up roughly, one lifting him by his arm bindings and the other by the ropes on his legs, and they pitched him in flat on the floor of the little jail office. He wriggled himself under a table and lay there, sniffling out his fear and relief. His tongue hung out of his mouth like the tongue of a tied calf, and he panted with choky, slobbering sounds.

The deputy sheriff and the constable left him lying and went to a water bucket in the corner and drank down brimming dippers, turn and turn about, as though their

thirst was unslakable. It was Dink Bynum, the deputy jailer, who had admitted them, and in the absence of his superior he was in charge solely. He waited until the two had lowered the water line in the cedar bucket by a matter of inches.

"Purty quick work, boys," he said professionally, "if this is the right nigger."

"I guess there ain't much doubt about him bein' the right one," said the constable, whose name was Quarles. "Is there, Gus?" he added.

"No doubt at all in my mind," said the deputy. He wiped his mouth on his sleeve, which smeared the dust across his face in a sort of pattern.

"How'd you fellers come to git him?" asked Bynum.

"Well," said the deputy, "we got out to the Hampton place about dinner time I reckin it was. Every man along the creek and every boy that was big enough to tote a gun was out scourin' the woods and there wasn't nobody round the place exceptin' a passel of the womenfolks. Just over the fence where the nigger was s'posed to have crossed we found his old wool hat layin' right where he'd run out from under it and we let the dogs smell of it, and inside of five minutes they'd picked up a trail and was openin' out on it. It was monstrous hot going through them thick bottoms afoot, and me and Quarles here outrun the sheriff and the others. Four miles back of Florence Station, and not more'n a mile from the river, we found this nigger treed up a hackberry with the dogs bayin' under him. I figure he'd been hidin' out in the woods all night and was makin' for the river, aimin' to cross, when the dogs fetched up behind him and made him take to a tree."

"Did you carry him back for the girl to see?"

"No," said the deputy sheriff. "Me and Quarles we

talked it over after we'd got him down and had him roped up. In the first place she wasn't in no condition to take a look at him, and besides we knowed that them Massac people jest natchelly wouldn't listen to nothin' oncet they laid eyes on him. They'd 'a' tore him apart bodily."

The bound figure on the floor began moaning in a steady, dead monotone, with his lips against the planking.

"So, bein' as me and Quarles wanted the credit for bringin' him in, not to mention the reward," went on the deputy, without a glance at the moaning negro, "we decided not to take no chances. I kept him out of sight until Quarles could go over to the river and borrow a rig, and we driv in with him by the lower road, across the iron bridge, without goin' anywhere near Massac."

"What does the nigger say for himself?" asked Bynum, greedy for all the details.

"Huh!" said the deputy. "He's been too scared to say much of anything. Says he'd tramped up here from below the state line and was makin' for Ballard County, lookin' for a job. He's a strange nigger all right. And he as good as admits he was right near the Hampton place yistiddy evenin' at milkin' time, when the girl was waylaid, and says he only run because the dogs took out after him and scared him. But here he is. We've done our duty and delivered him, and now if the boys out yonder on Massac want to come in and take him out that's their lookout and yourn, Dink."

"I reckon you ain't made no mistake," said Bynum. Cursing softly under his breath he walked over and spurned the prisoner with his heavy foot. The negro writhed under the pressure like a crushed insect. The under jailer looked down at him with a curious tautening of his heavy features.

"The papers call 'em burly black brutes," he said, "and

I never seen one of 'em yit that was more'n twenty years old or run over a hundred and thirty pound." He raised his voice: "Jim—oh, Jim!"

The inner door of sheet iron opened with a suspicious instantaneousness, and in the opening appeared a black jail trusty, a confirmed chicken thief. He ducked his head in turn toward each of the white men, carefully keeping his uneasy gaze away from the little negro lying between the table legs in the corner.

"Yas, suh, boss—right here, suh," said the trusty.

"Here, Jim"—the deputy jailer was opening his pocket-knife and passing it over—"take and cut them ropes off that nigger's arms and laigs."

With a ludicrous alacrity the trusty obeyed.

"Now pull him up on his feet!" commanded Bynum. "I guess we might as well leave them cuffs on him—eh?" he said to the deputy sheriff. The deputy nodded. Bynum took down from a peg over the jailer's desk a ring bearing many jingling keys of handwrought iron. "Bring him in here, Jim," he bade the trusty.

He stepped through the inner door and the negro Jim followed him, steering the manacled little negro. Quarles, the constable, and the deputy sheriff tagged behind to see their catch properly caged. They went along a short corridor, filled with a stifling, baked heat and heavy with the smell of penned-up creatures. There were faces at the barred doors of the cells that lined one side of this corridor—all black or yellow faces except one white one; and from these cells came no sound at all as the three white men and the two negroes passed. Only the lone white prisoner spoke out.

"Who is he, Dink?" he called eagerly. "What's he done?"

"Shut up!" ordered his keeper briefly, and that was the only answer he made. At the far end of the passage

Bynum turned a key in a creaky lock and threw back the barred door of an inner cell, sheathed with iron and lacking a window. The trusty shoved in the little handcuffed negro and the negro groveled on the wooden floor upon all fours. Bynum locked the door and the three white men tramped back through the silent corridor, followed by the sets of white eyes that stared out unwinkingly at them through the iron-latticed grills. It was significant that from the time of the arrival at the jail not one of the whites had laid his hands actually upon the prisoner.

"Well, boys," said Bynum to the others by way of a farewell, "there he is and there he'll stay—unless them Massac Creek folks come and git him. You've done your sworn duty and I've done mine. I locked him up and I won't be responsible for what happens now. I know this much—I ain't goin' to git myself crippled up savin' that nigger. If a mob wants to come let 'em come on!"

No mob came from Massac that night or the next night either; and on the second day there was a big basket picnic and rally under a brush arbor at the Shady Grove schoolhouse—the biggest meeting of the whole campaign it was to be, with speaking, and the silver cornet band out from town to make music, and the oldest living Democrat in the county sitting on the platform, and all that. Braving the piled-on layers of heat that rode the parched country like witch-hags, half the town went to Shady Grove. Nearly everybody went that could travel. All the morning wagons and buggies were clattering out of town, headed toward the west. And in the cooking dead calm of the mid-afternoon the mob from Massac came.

They came by roundabout ways, avoiding those main traveled roads over which the crowds were gathering in toward the common focus of the Shady Grove schoolhouse; and coming so, on horseback by twos and threes,

and leaving their horses in a thicket half a mile out, they were able to reach the edge of the town unnoticed and unsuspected. The rest, their leader figured, would be easy. A mistake in judgment by the town fathers in an earlier day had put the public square near the northern boundary, and the town, instead of growing up to it, grew away from it in the opposite direction, so that the square stood well beyond the thickly settled district.

All things had worked out well for their purpose. The sheriff and the jailer, both candidates for renomination, were at Shady Grove, and the sheriff had all his deputies with him, electioneering for their own jobs and his. Legal Row, the little street of lawyers' offices back of the square, might have been a byroad in old Pompeii for all the life that showed along its short and simmering length. No idlers lay under the water maples and the red oaks in the square. The jail baked in the sunlight, silent as a brick tomb, which indeed it somewhat resembled; and on the wide portico of the courthouse a loafer dog of remote hound antecedents alternately napped and roused to snap at the buzzing flies. The door of the clerk's office stood agape and through the opening came musty, snuffy smells of old leather and dry-rotted deeds. The wide hallway that ran from end to end of the old building was empty and echoed like a cave to the frequent thump of the loafer dog's leg joints upon the planking.

Indeed, the whole place had but a single occupant. In his office back of the circuit-court room Judge Priest was asleep, tilted back in a swivel chair, with his short, plump legs propped on a table and his pudgy hands locked across his stomach, which gently rose and fell with his breathing. His straw hat was on the table, and in a corner leaned his inevitable traveling companion in summer weather—a vast and cavernous umbrella of a pattern that is probably obsolete now, an unkempt old drab slattern

of an umbrella with a cracked wooden handle and a crippled rib that dangled away from its fellows as though shamed by its afflicted state. The campaigning had been hard on the old judge. The Monday before, at a rally at Temple's Mills, he had fainted, and this day he hadn't felt equal to going to Shady Grove. Instead he had come to his office after dinner to write some letters and had fallen asleep. He slept on for an hour, a picture of pink and cherubic old age, with little beadings of sweat popping out thickly on his high bald head and a gentle little snoring sound, of first a drone and then a whistle, pouring steadily from his pursed lips.

Outside a dry-fly rasped the brooding silence up and down with its fret-saw refrain. In the open spaces the little heat waves danced like so many stress marks, accenting the warmth and giving emphasis to it; and far down the street, which ran past the courthouse and the jail and melted into a country road so imperceptibly that none knew exactly where the street left off and the road began, there appeared a straggling, irregular company of men marching, their shapes more than half hid in a dust column of their own raising. The Massac men were coming.

I believe there is a popular conception to the effect that an oncoming mob invariably utters a certain indescribable, sinister, muttering sound that is peculiar to mobs. For all I know that may be true of some mobs, but certain it was that this mob gave vent to no such sounds. This mob came on steadily, making no more noise than any similar group of seventy-five or eighty men tramping over a dusty road might be expected to make.

For the most part they were silent and barren of speech. One youngish man kept repeating to himself a set phrase as he marched along. This phrase never varied in word or expression. It was: "Goin' to git that nigger! Goin'

to git that nigger!"—that was all—said over and over again in a dull, steady monotone. By its constant reiteration he was working himself up, just as a rat terrier may be worked up by constant hissed references to purely imaginary rats.

Their number was obscured by the dust their feet lifted. It was as if each man at every step crushed with his toe a puffball that discharged its powdery particles upward into this face. Some of them carried arms openly—shotguns and rifles. The others showed no weapons, but had them. It seemed that every fourth man, nearly, had coiled over his shoulder a rope taken from a plough or a well-bucket. They had enough rope to hang ten men or a dozen—yes, with stinting, to hang twenty. One man labored under the weight of a three-gallon can of coal-oil, so heavy that he had to shift it frequently from one tired arm to the other. In that weather the added burden made the sour sweat run down in streaks, furrowing the grime on his face. The Massac Creek blacksmith had a sledge-hammer over his shoulder and was in the front rank. Not one was masked or carried his face averted. Nearly all were grown men and not one was under twenty. A certain definite purpose showed in their gait. It showed, also, in the way they closed up and became a more compact formation as they came within sight of the trees fringing the square.

Down through the drowsing town edge they stepped, giving alarm only to the chickens that scratched languidly where scrub-oaks cast a skimpy shade across the road; but as they reached the town line they passed a clutter of negro cabins clustering about a little doggery. A negro woman stepped to a door and saw them. Distractedly, fluttering like a hen, she ran into the bare, grassless yard, setting up a hysterical outcry. A negro man came quickly from the cabin, clapped his hand over

her mouth and dragged her back inside, slamming the door to behind him with a kick of his bare foot. Unseen hands shut the other cabin doors and the woman's half-smothered cries came dimly through the clapboarded wall; but a slim black darky darted southward from the doggery, worming his way under a broken, snaggled fence and keeping the straggling line of houses and stables between him and the marchers. This fleeing figure was Jeff, Judge Priest's negro bodyservant, who had a most amazing faculty for always being wherever things happened.

Jeff was short and slim and he could run fast. He ran fast now, snatching off his hat and carrying it in his hand—the surest of all signs that a negro is traveling at his top gait. A good eighth of a mile in advance of the mob, he shot in at the back door of the courthouse and flung himself into his employer's room.

"Jedge! Jedge!" he panted tensely. "Jedge Priest, please, suh, wake up—the mobbers is comin'!"

Judge Priest came out of his nap with a jerk that uprighted him in his chair.

"What's that, boy?"

"The w'ite folks is comin' after that there little nigger over in the jail. I outrun 'em to git yere and tell you, suh."

"Ah-hah!" said Judge Priest, which was what Judge Priest generally said first of all when something struck him forcibly. He reared himself up briskly and reached for his hat and umbrella.

"Which way are they comin' from?" he asked as he made for the hall and the front door.

"Comin' down the planin'-mill road into Jefferson Street," explained Jeff, gasping out the words.

As the old judge, with Jeff in his wake, emerged from the shadows of the tall hallway into the blinding glare

of the portico they met Dink Bynum, the deputy jailer, just diving in. Dink was shirt-sleeved. His face was curiously checkered with red-and-white blotches. He cast a backward glance, bumped into the judge's greater bulk and caromed off, snatching at the air to recover himself.

"Are you desertin' your post, Dink?" demanded the judge.

"Jedge, there wasn't no manner of use in my stayin'," babbled Bynum. "I'm all alone and there's a whole big crowd of 'em comin' yonder. They'll git that nigger anyhow—and he deserves it!" he burst out.

"Dink Bynum, where are the keys to that jail?" said Judge Priest, speaking unusually fast for him.

"I clean forgot 'em!" he quavered. "I left 'em hangin' in the jail office."

"And also I note you left the outside door of the jail standin' wide open," said the judge, glancing to the left. "Where's your pistol?"

"In my pocket—in my pocket, here."

"Git it out!"

"Jedge Priest, I wouldn't dare make no resistance single-handed—I got a family—I——" faltered the unhappy deputy jailer.

The moving dust cloud, with legs and arms showing through its swirling front, was no more than a hundred yards away. You could make out details—hot, red, resolute faces; the glint of the sun on a gunbarrel; the polished nose of the blacksmith's sledge; the round curve of a greasy oilcan.

"Dink Bynum," said Judge Priest, "git that gun out and give it to me—quick!"

"Jedge, listen to reason!" begged Bynum. "You're a candidate yourse'f. Sentiment is against that nigger—strong. You'll hurt your own chances if you interfere."

The judge didn't answer. His eyes were on the dust

cloud and his hand was extended. His pudgy fingers closed round the heavy handful of blued steel that Dink Bynum passed over and he shoved it out of sight. Laboring heavily down the steps he opened his umbrella and put it over his shoulder, and as he waddled down the short gravel path his shadow had the grotesque semblance of a big crawling land terrapin following him. One look Judge Priest sent over his shoulder. Dink Bynum and Jeff had both vanished. Except for the men from Massac there was no living being to be seen.

They didn't see him, either, until they were right upon him. He came out across the narrow sidewalk of the square and halted directly in their path, with his right hand raised and his umbrella tilted far back, so that its shade cut across the top of his straw hat, making a distinct line. "Boys," he said familiarly, almost paternally — "Boys, I want to have a word with you."

Most of the Massac men knew him—some of them knew him very well. They had served on juries under him; he had eaten Sunday dinners under their rooftrees. They stopped, their rear rows crowding up closer until they were a solid mass facing him. Beyond him they could see the outer door of the jail gaping hospitably, and the sight gave an edge to their purpose that was like the gnawing of physical hunger. Above all things they were sharp-set to hurry forward the thing they had it in their minds to do.

"Boys," said the judge, "most of you are friends of mine—and I want to tell you something. You musn't do the thing you're purposin' to do—you mustn't do it!"

A snorted outburst, as of incredulity, came from the sweating clump of countrymen confronting him.

"The hell we mustn't!" drawled one of them derisively, and a snicker started.

The snicker grew to a laugh—a laugh with a thread

of grim menace in it, and a tinge of mounting man-hysteria. Even to these men, whose eyes were used to resting on ungainly and awkward old men, the figure of Judge Priest, standing in their way alone, had a grotesque emphasis. The judge's broad stomach stuck far out in front and was balanced by the rearward bulge of his umbrella. His white chin-beard was streaked with tobacco-stains. The legs of his white linen trousers were caught up on his shins and bagged dropsically at the knees. The right-hand pocket of his black alpaca coat was sagged away down by some heavy unseen weight.

None of the men in the front rank joined in the snickering, however; they only looked at the judge with a sort of respectful obstinacy. There was nothing said for maybe twenty seconds.

"Jedge Priest," said a spokesman, a tall, spare, bony man with a sandy drooping moustache and a nose that beaked over like a butcher-bird's bill—"Jedge Priest, we've come after a nigger boy that's locked up in that jail yonder and we're goin' to have him! Speaking personally, most of us here know you and we all like you, suh; but I'll have to ask you to stand aside and let us go ahead about our business."

"Gentlemen," said Judge Priest, without altering his tone, "the law of this state provides a proper . . ."

"The law provides—eh?" mimicked the man who had laughed first. "The law provides, does it?"

". . . provides a fittin' and an orderly way of attendin to these matters," went on the judge. "In the absence of the other sworn officials of this county I represent in my own humble person the majesty of the law, and I say to you——"

"Jedge Priest," cut in the beaky-nosed man, "you are an old man and you stand mighty high in this community —none higher. We don't none of us want to do nothin'

or say nothin' to you that mout be regretted afterwards; but we air goin' to have that nigger out of that jail and stretch his neck for him. He's one nigger that's lived too long already. You'd better step back!" he went on. "You're just wastin' your time and ourn."

A growling assent to this sentiment ran through the mob. It was a growl that carried a snarl. There was a surging forward movement from the rear and a restless rustle of limbs.

"Wait a minute, boys!" said the leader. "Wait a minute. There's no hurry—we'll git him! Jedge Priest," he went on, changing his tone to one of regardful admonition, "you've got a race on for reëlection and you'll need every vote you kin git. I hope you ain't goin' to do nothin' that'll maybe hurt your chances among us Massac Creekers."

"That's the second time that's been throwed up to me inside of five minutes," said Judge Priest. "My chances for election have nothin' to do with the matter now in hand—remember that!"

"All right—all right!" assented the other. "Then I'll tell you somethin' else. Us men have come in broad daylight, not hidin' our faces from the noonday sun. We air open and aboveboard about this thing. Every able-bodied, self-respectin' white man in our precinct is right here with me to-day. We've talked it over and we know what we air doin'. If you want to take down our names and prosecute us in the cotes you kin go ahead."

Somebody else spoke up.

"I'd admire to see the jury in this county that would pop the law to ary one of us for swingin' up this nigger!" he said, chuckling at the naked folly of the notion.

"You're right, my son," said the judge, singling out the speaker with his aimed forefinger. "I ain't tryin' to scare grown men like you with such talk as that. I

know how you feel. I can understand how you feel—every man with white blood in his veins knows just what your feelin's are. I'm not trying to threaten you. I only want to reason with you and talk sense with you. This here boy ain't been identified yet—remember that!"

"We know he's guilty!" said the leader.

"I'll admit that circumstances may be against him," pleaded the judge, "but his guilt remains to be proved. You can't hang any man—you can't hang even this poor, miserable little darky—jest on suspicion."

"The dogs trailed him, didn't they?"

"A dog's judgment is mighty nigh as poor as a man's sometimes," he answered back, fighting hard for every shade of favor. "It's my experience that a bloodhound is about the biggest fool dog there is. Now listen here to me, boys, a minute. That boy in the jail is goin' to be tried just as soon as I can convene a special grand jury to indict him and a special term of court to try him, and if he's guilty I promise you he'll hang inside of thirty days."

"And drag that pore little thing—my own first cousin—into a cotehouse to be shamed before a lot of these town people—no!" the voice of the leader rose high. "Cotes and juries may do for some cases, but not for this. That nigger is goin' to die right now!"

He glanced back at his followers; they were ready—and more than ready. On his right a man had uncoiled a well-rope and was tying a slipknot in it. He tested the knot with both hands and his teeth, then spat to free his lips of the gritty dust and swung the rope out in long doubled coils to reeve the noose in it.

"Jedge Priest, for the last time, stand aside!" warned the beaky-nosed man. His voice carried the accent of finality and ultimate decision in it. "You've done wore

our patience plum' out. Boys, if you're ready come on!"

"One minute!" The judge's shrill blare of command held them against their wills. He was lowering his umbrella. "One minute and one word more!"

Shuffling their impatient feet they watched him backing with a sort of ungainly alertness over from right to left, dragging the battered brass ferrule of his umbrella after him, so that it made a line from one curb of the narrow street to the other. Doing this his eyes never left their startled faces. At the far side he halted and stepped over so that they faced this line from one side and he from the other. The line lay between them, furrowed in the deep dust.

"Men," he said, and his lifelong affectation of deliberately ungrammatical speech was all gone from him. "I have said to you all I can say. I will now kill the first man who puts his foot across that line!"

There was nothing Homeric, nothing heroic about it. Even the line he had made in the dust waggled, and was skewed and crooked like the trail of a blind worm. His old figure was still as grotesquely plump and misshapen as ever—the broken rib of his umbrella slanted askew like the crippled wing of a fat bat; but the pudgy hand that brought the big blue gun out of the right pocket of the alpaca coat and swung it out and up, muzzle lifted, was steady and sure. His thumb drew the hammer back and the double click broke on the amazed dumb silence that had fallen like two clangs upon an anvil. The wrinkles in his face all set into fixed, hard lines.

It was about six feet from them to where the line crossed the road. Heavily, slowly, diffidently, as though their feet were weighted with the leaden boots of a deep-sea diver, yet pushed on by one common spirit, they moved a foot at a time right up to the line. And there they

halted, their eyes shifting from him to the dustmark and back again, rubbing their shoulders up against one another and shuffling on their legs like cattle startled by a snake in the path.

The beaky-nosed man fumbled in the breast of his unbuttoned vest, loosening a revolver in a shoulder holster. A twenty-year-old boy, his face under its coating of dust as white as flour dough, made as if to push past him and break across the line; but the Massac blacksmith caught him and plucked him back. The leader, still fumbling inside his vest, addressed the judge hoarsely:

"I certainly don't want to have to kill you, Jedge Priest!" he said doggedly.

"I don't want to have to kill anybody," answered back Judge Priest; "but, as God is my judge, I'm going to kill the first one of you that crosses that line. If it was my own brother I'd kill him. I don't know which of you will kill me, but I know which one I'm going to kill—the first man across!"

They swayed their bodies from side to side—not forward but from side to side. They fingered their weapons, and some of them swore in a disappointed, irritated sort of way. This lasted perhaps half a minute, perhaps a whole minute—anyway it lasted for some such measurable period of time—before the crumbling crust of their resolution was broken through. The break came from the front and the center. Their leader, the lank, tall man with the down-tilted nose, was the first to give ground visibly. He turned about and without a word he began pushing a passage for himself through the scrouging pack of them. Breathing hard, like men who had run a hard race, they followed him, going away with scarcely a backward glance toward the man who—alone—had daunted them. They followed after their leader as mules follow after a bell-mare, wiping their grimy shirtsleeves across

their sweaty, grimier faces and glancing toward each other with puzzled, questioning looks. One of them left a heavy can of coal-oil behind him upright in the middle of the road.

The old judge stood still until they were a hundred yards away. He uncocked the revolver and put the deadly thing back in his pocket. Mechanically he raised his umbrella, fumbling a little with the stubborn catch, and tilted it over his left shoulder; his turtlelike shadow sprang out again, but this time it was in front of him. Very slowly, like a man who was dead tired, he made his way back up the gravel path toward the courthouse. Jeff magically materialized himself out of nowhere, but of Dink Bynum there was no sign.

"Is them w'ite gen'l'men gone?" inquired Jeff, his eyes popping with the aftershock of what he had just witnessed—had witnessed from under the courthouse steps.

"Yes," said the judge wearily, his shoulders drooping. "They're gone."

"Jedge, ain't they liable to come back?"

"No; they won't come back."

"You kinder skeered 'em off, jedge!" An increasing admiration for his master percolated sweetly through Jeff's remarks like dripping honey.

"No; I didn't scare 'em off exactly," answered the judge. "They are not the kind of men who can be scared off. I merely invoked the individual equation, if you know what that means?"

"Yas, suh—that's whut I thought it wuz," assented Jeff eagerly—the more eagerly because he had no idea what the judge meant.

"Jeff," the old man said, "help me into my office and get me a dipper of drinkin' water. I reckin maybe I've got a tech of the sun." He tottered a little and groped outward with one hand.

Guided to the room, he sank inertly into his chair and feebly fought off the blackness that kept blanking his sight. Jeff fanned him with his hat.

"I guess maybe this here campaignin' has been too much for me," said the judge slowly. "It must be the weather. I reckin from now on, Jeff, I'll have to set back sort of easy and let these young fellows run things."

He sat there until the couching sun brought long, thin shadows and a false promise of coolness. Dink Bynum returned unobtrusively to his abandoned post of duty; the crowds began coming back from the Shady Grove schoolhouse; and Jeff found time to slip out and confiscate to private purposes a coal-oil can that still stood in the roadway. He knew of a market for such commodities. The telephone bell rang and the old judge, raising his sagged frame with an effort, went to the instrument and took down the receiver. Long-distance lines were beginning to creep out through the county and this was a call from Florence Station, seven miles away.

"That you, Jedge Priest?" said the voice over the wire. "This is Brack Rodgers. I've been tryin' to raise the sheriff's office, but they don't seem to answer. Well, suh, they got the nigger what done that devilmint over at the Hampton place on Massac this evenin'. Yes, suh—about two hours ago. He was a nigger named Moore that worked on the adjoinin' place to Hampton's —a tobacco hand. Nobody suspected him until this mornin', when some of the other darkies got to talkin' round; and Buddy Quarles heared the talk and went after him. The nigger he fit back and Buddy had to shoot him a couple of times. Oh, yes, he died—died about an hour afterward; but before he died he owned up to ever'thing. I reckin' on the whole, he got off light by bein' killed. Which, Jedge?—the nigger that's there in the jail? No, suh; he didn't have nothin' a-tall to do with it—the other

nigger said so while he was dyin'. I jedge it was what you mout call another case of mistaken identity on the part of them fool hounds."

To be sure of getting the full party vote out and to save the cost of separate staffs of precinct officers, the committee ordained that the Democratic primaries should be held on the regular election day. The rains of November turned the dusts of August to high-edged ridges of sticky ooze. Election day came, wet and windy and bleak. Men cutting across the yellow-brown pastures, on their way to the polling places, scared up flocks of little grayish birds that tumbled through the air like wind-driven leaves and dropped again into the bushes with small tweaking sounds, like the slicing together of shears; and as if to help out this illusion, they showed in their tails barrings of white feathers which opened and closed like scissor-blades. The night came on; and it matched the day, being raw and gusty, with clouds like clotted whey whipping over and round a full moon that resembled a churn-dasher covered with yellow clabber. Then it started raining.

The returns—county, state, and national—were received at the office of the *Daily Evening News;* by seven o'clock the place was packed. Candidates and prominent citizens were crowded inside the railing that marked off the business department and the editorial department; while outside the railing and stretching on outdoors, into the street, the male populace of the town herded together in an almost solid mass. Inside, the air was streaky with layers of tobacco smoke and rich with the various smells of a small printing shop on a damp night. Behind a glass partition, halfway back toward the end of the building, a small press was turning out the weekly edition, smacking its metal lips over the taste of the raw ink. Its rum-

bling clatter, with the slobbery sputter of the arclights in the ceiling overhead, made an accompaniment to the voices of the crowd. Election night was always the biggest night of the year in our town—bigger than Christmas Eve even.

The returns at large came by telegraph, but the returns of the primaries were sent in from the various precincts of town and county by telephone; or, in cases where there was no telephone, they were brought in by hard-riding messengers. At intervals, from the telegraph office two doors away, a boy would dash out and worm his way in through the eager multitude that packed and overflowed the narrow sidewalk; and through a wicket he would fling crumpled yellow tissue sheets at the editor of the paper. Then the editor would read out:

"Seventeen election districts in the Ninth Assembly District of New York City give Schwartz, for coroner——"

"Ah, shuckin's! Fooled again!"

"St Louis—at this hour—nine-thirty—the Republicans concede that the entire Democratic state ticket has won by substantial majorities——"

"Course it has! What did they expect Missouri to do?"

"Buffalo—Doran—for mayor, has been elected. The rest of the reform ticket is——"

"Oh, dad blame it! Henry, throw that stuff away and see if there ain't some way to get something definite from Lang's Store or Clark's River on the race for state senator!"

"Yes, or for sheriff—that's the kind of thing we're all honin' to know."

The telephone bell rang.

"Here you are, Mr. Tompkins—complete returns from Gum Spring Precinct."

"Now—quiet, boys, please, so we can all hear."

It was on this night that there befell the tragedy I made mention of in the first paragraph of this chapter. The old County Ring was smashing up. One by one the veterans were going under. A stripling youth not two years out of law school had beaten old Captain Daniel Boone Calkins for representative; and old Captain Calkins had been representative so many years he thought the job belonged to him. Not much longer was the race for sheriff in doubt, or the race for state senator. Younger men snatched both jobs away from the old men who held them.

In a far corner, behind a barricade of backs and shoulders, sat Major J. Q. A. Pickett, a spare and knotty old man, and Judge Priest, a chubby and rounded one. Of all the old men, the judge seemingly had run the strongest race, and Major Pickett, who had been county clerk for twenty years or better, had run close behind him; but as the tally grew nearer its completion the major's chances faded to nothing at all and the judge's grew dimmer and dimmer.

"What do you think, judge?" inquired Major Pickett for perhaps the twentieth time, clinging forlornly to a hope that was as good as gone already.

"I think, major, that you and me are about to be notified that our fellow citizens have returned us onc't more to private pursoots," said the old judge, and there was a game smile on his face. For so far back that he hated to remember how long it was, he had held his office—holding it as a trust of honor. He was too old actively to reënter the practice of law, and he had saved mighty little out of his salary as judge. He would be an idle man and a poor one—perhaps actually needy; and the look out of his eyes by no means matched the smile on his face.

"I can't seem to understand it," said the major, crushed. "Always before, the old boys could be depended upon to turn out for us."

"Major," said Judge Priest, letting his wrinkled old hand fall on the major's sound leg, "did you ever stop to think that there ain't so many of the old boys left any more? There used to be a hundred and seventy-five members of the camp in good standin'. How many are there now? And how many of the boys did we bury this past year?"

There was a yell from up front and a scrouging forward of bodies.

Editor Tompkins was calling off something. The returns from Clark's River and from Lang's Store had arrived together. He read out the figures. These two old men, sitting side by side, at the back, listened with hands cupped behind ears that were growing a bit faulty of hearing. They heard.

Major J. Q. A. Pickett got up very painfully and very slowly. He hooked his cane up under him and limped out unnoticed. That was the night when the major established his right of squatter sovereignty over that one particular spot at the far end of Billy Sherrill's bar-rail.

Thus deserted, the judge sat alone for a minute. The bowl of his corncob pipe had lost its spark of life and he sucked absently at the cold, bitterish stem. Then he, too, got on his feet and made his way round the end of a cluttered-up writing desk into the middle of the room. It took an effort, but he bore himself proudly erect.

"Henry," he called out to the editor, in his homely whine—"Henry, would you mind tellin' me—jest for curiosity—how my race stands?"

"Judge," said the editor, "by the latest count you are forty-eight votes behind Mr. Prentiss."

"And how many more precincts are there to hear from, my son?"

"Just one—Massac!"

"Ah-hah! Massac!" said the old judge. "Well, gentlemen," he went on, addressing the company generally, "I reckon I'll be goin' on home and turnin' in. This is the latest I've been up at night in a good while. I won't wait round no longer—I reckin everything is the same as settled. I wisht one of you boys would convey my congratulations to Mr. Prentiss and tell him for me that——"

There was a bustle at the door and a newcomer broke in through the press of men's bodies. He was dripping with rain and spattered over the front with blobs of yellow mud. He was a tall man, with a drooping moustache and a nose that beaked at the tip like a butcher-bird's mandible. With a moist splash he slammed a pair of wet saddlebags down on the narrow shelf at the wicket and, fishing with his fingers under one of the flaps, he produced a scrawled sheet of paper. The editor of the *Daily Evening News* grabbed it from him and smoothed it out and ran a pencil down the irregular, weaving column of figures.

"Complete returns on all the county races are now in," he announced loudly, and every face turned toward him.

"The returns from Massac Precinct make no change in any of the races. . . ."

The cheering started in full volume; but the editor raised his hand and stilled it.

". . . make no change in any of the races—except one."

All sound died and the crowd froze to silence.

"Massac Precinct has eighty-four registered Democratic votes," went on Tompkins, prolonging the suspense. For a country editor, he had the dramatic instinct most highly developed.

"And of these eighty-four, all eighty-four voted."

"Yes; go on! Go on, Henry!"

"And all eighty-four of 'em—every mother's son of 'em—voted for the Honorable William Pitman Priest," finished Tompkins. "Judge, you win by——"

Really, that sentence was not finished until Editor Tompkins got his next day's paper out. The old judge felt blindly for a chair, sat down and put his face in his two hands. Eight or ten old men pressed in toward him from all directions; and, huddling about him, they raised their several cracked and quavery voices in a yell that ripped its way up and through and above and beyond the mixed and indiscriminate whoopings of the crowd.

This yell, which is shrill and very penetrating, has been described in print technically as the Rebel yell.

THE FOURTH MAN[1]

John Russell

The raft might have been taken for a swath of cut sedge or a drifting tangle of roots as it slid out of the shadowy river mouth at dawn and dipped into the first ground swell. But while the sky brightened and the breeze came fresh offshore it picked a way among shoals and swampy islets with purpose and direction, and when at last the sun leaped up and cleared his bright eye of the morning mists it had passed the wide entrance to the bay and stood to open sea.

It was a curious craft for such a venture, of a type that survives here and there in the obscure corners of the world. The coracle maker would have scorned it. The first navigating pithecanthrope built nearly as well with his log and bush. A mat of pandanus leaves served for its sail and a paddle of niaouli wood for its helm. But it had a single point of real seaworthiness. Its twin floats, paired as a catamaran, were woven of reed bundles and bamboo sticks upon triple rows of bladders. It was light as a bladder itself, elastic, fit to ride any weather. One other quality this raft possessed which recommended it beyond all comfort and safety to its present crew. It was very nearly invisible. They had only to unstep its mast and lie flat in the cup of its soggy platform and they could not be spied half a mile away.

Four men occupied the raft. Three of them were

[1]Reprinted from *Where the Pavement Ends,* by John Russell, by and with permission of and special arrangement with Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., authorized publishers.

white. Their bodies had been scored with brambles and blackened with dried blood, and on wrist and ankle they bore the black and wrinkled stain of the gyves. The hair upon them was long and matted. They wore only the rags of blue canvas uniforms. But they were whites, members of the superior race—members of a highly superior race according to those philosophers who rate criminal aberration as a form of genius.

The fourth was the man who had built the raft and was now sailing it. There was nothing superior about him. His skin was a layer of soot. His prognathous jaw carried out the angle of a low forehead. No line of beauty redeemed his lean limbs and knobby joints. Nature had set upon him her plainest stamp of inferiority, and his only attempts to relieve it were the twist of bark about his middle and the prong of pig ivory through the cartilage of his nose. Altogether a very ordinary specimen of one of the lowest branches of the human family—the Canaques of New Caledonia.

The three whites sat together well forward, and so they had sat in silence for hours. But at sunrise, as if some spell had been raised by the clang of that great copper gong in the east, they stirred and breathed deep of the salt air and looked at one another with hope in their haggard faces, and then back toward the land which was now no more than a gray-green smudge behind them.

"Friends," said the eldest, whose temples were bound with a scrap of crimson scarf, "Friends—the thing is done."

With a gesture like conjuring he produced from the breast of his tattered blouse three cigarettes, fresh and round, and offered them.

"Nippers!" cried the one at his right. "True nippers—name of a little good man! And here? Doctor, I

always said you were a marvel. See if they be not new from the box!"

Dr. Dubosc smiled. Those who had known him in very different circumstances about the boulevards, the lobbies, the clubs, would have known him again and in spite of all disfigurement by that smile. And here, at the bottom of the earth, it had set him still apart in the prisons, the cobalt mines, the chain gangs of a community not much given to mirth. Many a crowded lecture hall in Montpellier had seen him touch some intellectual fire-work with just such a twinkle behind his bristly gray brows, with just such a thin curl of the lip.

"By way of celebration," he explained. "Consider. There are seventy-five evasions from Noumea every six months, of which not more than one succeeds. I had the figures myself from Dr. Pierre at the infirmary. He is not much of a physician, but a very honest fellow. Could anybody win on that percentage without dissipating? I ask you."

"Therefore you prepared for this?"

"It is now three weeks since I bribed the night guard to get these same nippers."

The other regarded him with admiration. Sentiment came readily upon this beardless face, tender and languid, but overdrawn, with eyes too large and soft and oval too long. It was one of those faces familiar enough to the police which might serve as model for an angel were it not associated with some revolting piece of deviltry. Fenayrou himself had been condemned "to perpetuity" as an incorrigible.

"Is not our doctor a wonder?" he inquired as he handed a cigarette along to the third white man. "He thinks of everything. You should be ashamed to grumble. See—we are free, after all. Free!"

The third was a gross, pock-marked man with hairless

lids, known sometimes as Niniche, Trois Huit, Le Tordeur, but chiefly among copains as Perroquet—a name derived perhaps from his beaked nose, or from some perception of his jailbird character. He was a garroter by profession, accustomed to rely upon his fists only for the exchange of amenities. Dubosc might indulge a fancy and Fenayrou seek to carry it as a pose, but The Parrot remained a gentleman of strictly serious turn. There is perhaps a tribute to the practical spirit of penal administration in the fact that while Dubosc was the most dangerous of these three and Fenayrou the most depraved, Perroquet was the one with the official reputation, whose escape would be signaled first among the "Wanted." He accepted the cigarette because he was glad to get it, but he said nothing until Dubosc passed a tin box of matches and the first gulp of picadura filled his lungs. . . .

"Wait till you've got your two feet on a pavé, my boy. That will be the time to talk of freedom. What? Suppose there came a storm."

"It is not the season of storms," observed Dubosc.

But The Parrot's word had given them a check. Such spirits as these, to whom the land had been a horror, would be slow to feel the terror of the sea. Back there they had left the festering limbo of a convict colony, oblivion. Out here they had reached the rosy threshold of the big round world again. They were men raised from the dead, charged with all the furious appetites of lost years, with the savor of life strong and sweet on their lips. And yet they paused and looked about in quickened perception, with the clutch at the throat that takes landsmen on big waters. The spaces were so wide and empty. The voices in their ears were so wide and murmurous. There was a threat in each wave that came from the depths, a sinister vibration. None of them

knew the sea. None knew its ways, what tricks it might play, what traps it might spread—more deadly than those of the jungle.

The raft was running now before a brisk chop with alternate spring and wallow, while the froth bubbled in over the prow and ran down among them as they sat.

"Where is that cursed ship that was to meet us here?" demanded Fenayrou.

"It will meet us right enough." Dubosc spoke carelessly, though behind the blown wisp of his cigarette he had been searching the outer horizon with keen glance. "This is the day, as agreed. We will be picked up off the mouth of the river."

"You say," growled Perroquet. "But where is any river now? Or any mouth? Sacred name! this wind will blow us to China if we keep on."

"We dare not lie in any closer. There is a government launch at Torrien. Also the traders go armed hereabouts, ready for chaps like us. And don't imagine that the native trackers have given us up. They are likely to be following still in their proas."

"So far!"

Fenayrou laughed, for The Parrot's dread of their savage enemies had a morbid tinge.

"Take care, Perroquet. They will eat you yet."

"Is it true?" demanded the other, appealing to Dubosc. "I have heard it is even permitted these devils to keep all runaways they can capture—Name of God!—to fatten on."

"An idle tale," smiled Dubosc. "They prefer the reward. But one hears of convicts being badly mauled. There was a forester who made a break from Baie du Sud and came back lacking an arm. Certainly these people have not lost the habit of cannibalism."

"Piecemeal," chuckled Fenayrou. "They will only

sample you, Perroquet. Let them make a stew of your brains. You would miss nothing."

But The Parrot swore.

"Name of a name—what brutes!" he said, and by a gesture recalled the presence of that fourth man who was of their party and yet so completely separated from them that they had almost forgotten him.

The Canaque was steering the raft. He sat crouched at the stern, his body glistening like varnished ebony with spray. He held the steering paddle, immobile as an image, his eyes fixed upon the course ahead.

There was no trace whatever of expression on his face, no hint of what he thought or felt or whether he thought or felt anything. He seemed not even aware of their regard, and each one of them experienced somehow that twinge of uneasiness with which the white always confronts his brother of color—this enigma brown or yellow or black he is fated never wholly to understand or to fathom. . . .

"It occurs to me," said Fenayrou in a pause, "that our friend here who looks like a shiny boot is able to steer us God knows where. Perhaps to claim the reward."

"Reassure yourself," answered Dubosc. "He steers by my order. Besides, it is a simple creature—an infant, truly, incapable of any but the most primitive reasoning."

"Is he incapable of treachery?"

"Of any that would deceive us. Also, he is bound by his duty. I made my bargain with his chief, up the river, and this one is sent to deliver us on board our ship. It is the only interest he has in us."

"And he will do it. Such is the nature of the native."

"I am glad you feel so," returned Fenayrou, adjusting himself indolently among the drier reeds and nursing the last of his cigarette. "For my part I wouldn't trust

a figurehead like that for two sous. Mazette! What a monkey face!"

"Brute!" repeated Perroquet, and this man, sprung from some vile river-front slum of Argenteuil, whose home had been the dock pilings, the grog shop, and the jail, even this man viewed the black Canaque from an immeasurable distance with the look of hatred and contempt. . . .

Under the heat of the day the two younger convicts lapsed presently into dozing. But Dubosc did not doze. His tormented soul peered out behind its mask as he stood to sweep the sky line again under shaded hand. His theory had been so precise, the fact was so different. He had counted absolutely on meeting the ship—some small schooner, one of those flitting, half-piratical traders of the copra islands that can be hired like cabs in a dark street for any questionable enterprise. Now there was no ship, and here was no crossroads where one might sit and wait. Such a craft as the catamaran could not be made to lie to.

The doctor foresaw ugly complications for which he had prepared and whereof he must bear the whole burden. The escape had been his own conception, directed by him from the start. He had picked his companions deliberately from the whole forced labor squad, Perroquet for his great strength, Fenayrou as a ready echo. He had made it plain since their first dash from the mine, during their skirmish with the military guards, their subsequent wanderings in the brush with bloodhounds and trackers on the trail—through every crisis—that he alone should be the leader.

For the others, they had understood well enough which of their number was the chief beneficiary. Those mysterious friends on the outside that were reaching half round the world to further their release had never heard of

such individuals as Fenayrou and The Parrot. Dubosc was the man who had pulled the wires: that brilliant physician whose conviction for murder had followed so sensationally, so scandalously, upon his sweep of academic and social honors. There would be clacking tongues in many a Parisian salon, and white faces in some, when news should come of his escape. Ah, yes, for example, they knew the highflyer of the band, and they submitted—so long as he led them to victory. They submitted, while reserving a depth of jealousy, the inevitable remnant of caste still persisting in this democracy of stripes and shame.

By the middle of the afternoon the doctor had taken certain necessary measures.

"Ho," said Fenayrou sleepily. "Behold our colors at the masthead. What is that for, comrade?"

"To help them sight us when the ship comes."

"What wisdom!" cried Fenayrou. "Always he thinks of everything, our doctor; everything——"

He stopped with the phrase on his lips and his hand outstretched toward the center of the platform. Here, in a damp depression among the reeds, had lain the wicker-covered bottle of green glass in which they carried their water. It was gone.

"Where is that flask?" he demanded. "The sun has grilled me like a bone."

"You will have to grill some more," said Dubosc grimly. "This crew is put on rations."

Fenayrou stared at him wide-eyed, and from the shadow of a folded mat The Parrot thrust his purpled face. "What do you sing me there? Where is that water?"

"I have it," said Dubosc.

They saw, in fact, that he held the flask between his knees, along with their single packet of food in its wrapping of cocoanut husk.

"I want a drink," challenged Perroquet.

"Reflect a little. We must guard our supplies like reasonable men. One does not know how long we may be floating here. . . ."

Fell a silence among them, heavy and strained, in which they heard only the squeaking of the frail basketwork as their raft labored in the wash. Slow as was their progress, they were being pushed steadily outward and onward, and the last cliffs of New Caledonia were no longer even a smudge in the west, but only a hazy line. And still they had seen no moving thing upon the great round breast of the sea that gleamed in its corselet of brass plates under a brazen sun.

"So that is the way you talk now?" began The Parrot, half choking. "You do not know how long? But you were sure enough when we started."

"I am still sure," returned Dubosc. "The ship will come. Only she cannot stay for us in one spot. She will be cruising to and fro until she intercepts us. We must wait."

"Ah, good! We must wait. And in the meantime, what? Fry here in the sacred heat with our tongue hanging out while you deal us drop by drop—*hein?*"

"Perhaps."

"But no!" The garroter clenched his hands. "Blood of God, there is no man big enough to feed me with a spoon!"

Fenayrou's chuckle came pat, as it had more than once, and Dubosc shrugged.

"You laugh!" cried Perroquet, turning in fury. "But how about this Lascar of a captain that lets us put to sea unprovided? What? He thinks of everything, does he? He thinks of everything! . . . Sacred farceur—let me hear you laugh again!"

Somehow Fenayrou was not so minded.

"And now he bids us be reasonable," concluded The Parrot. "Tell that to the devils in hell. You and your cigarettes, too. Bah—comedian!"

"It is true," muttered Fenayrou, frowning. "A bad piece of work for a captain of runaways."

But the doctor faced mutiny with his thin smile.

"All this alters nothing. Unless we would die very speedily, we must guard our water."

"By whose fault?"

"Mine," acknowledged the doctor. "I admit it. What then? We can't turn back. Here we are. Here we must stay. We can only do our best with what we have."

"I want a drink," repeated The Parrot, whose throat was afire since he had been denied.

"You can claim your share, of course. But take warning of one thing. After it is gone, do not think to sponge on us—on Fenayrou and me."

"He would be capable of it, the pig!" exclaimed Fenayrou, to whom this thrust had been directed. "I know him. See here, my old, the doctor is right. Fair for one, fair for all."

"I want a drink."

Dubosc removed the wooden plug from the flask.

"Very well," he said quietly.

With the delicacy that lent something of legerdemain to all his gestures, he took out a small canvas wallet, the crude equivalent of the professional black bag, from which he drew a thimble. Meticulously he poured a brimming measure, and Fenayrou gave a shout at the grumbler's fallen jaw as he accepted that tiny cup between his big fingers. Dubosc served Fenayrou and himself with the same amount before he recorked the bottle.

"In this way we should have enough to last us three

days—maybe more—with equal shares among the three of us."

Such was his summing of the demonstration, and it passed without comment, as a matter of course in the premises, that he should count as he did—ignoring that other who sat alone at the stern of the raft, the black Canaque, the fourth man.

Perroquet had been outmaneuvered, but he listened sullenly while for the hundredth time Dubosc recited his easy and definite plan for their rescue, as arranged with his secret correspondents.

"That sounds very well," observed The Parrot at last. "But what if these jokers only mock themselves of you. What if they have counted it good riddance to let you rot here? And us? Sacred name, that would be a famous jest! To let us wait for a ship and they have no ship!"

"Perhaps the doctor knows better than we how sure a source he counts upon," suggested Fenayrou slyly.

"That is so," said Dubosc with great good humor. "My faith, it would not be well for them to fail me. Figure to yourselves that there is a safety vault in Paris full of papers to be opened at my death. Certain friends of mine could hardly afford to have some little confessions published that would be found there. . . . Such a tale as this, for instance——"

And to amuse them he told an indecent anecdote of high life, true or fictitious, it mattered nothing, so he could make Fenayrou's eyes glitter and The Parrot growl in wonder. Therein lay his means of ascendancy over such men, the knack of eloquence and vision. Harried, worn, oppressed by fears that he could sense so much more sharply than they, he must expend himself now in vulgar marvels to distract these ruder minds. He succeeded

so far that when the wind fell at sunset they were almost cheerful, ready to believe that the morning would bring relief. They dined on dry biscuit and another thimbleful of water apiece and took watch by amiable agreement. And through that long clear night of stars, whenever the one of the three who lay awake between his comrades chanced to look aft, he could see the vague blot of another figure—the naked Canaque, who slumbered there apart.

It was an evil dawning. Fenayrou, on the morning trick, was aroused by a foot as hard as a hoof, and started up at Perroquet's wrathful face, with the doctor's graver glance behind.

"Idler! Good-for-nothing! Will you wake at least before I smash your ribs? Name of God, here is a way to stand watch!"

"Keep off!" cried Fenayrou wildly. "Keep off! Don't touch me!"

"Eh, and why not, fool? Do you know that the ship could have missed us? A ship could have passed us a dozen times while you slept!"

"Bourrique!"

"Vache!"

They spat the insults of the prison while Perroquet knotted his great fist over the other, who crouched away catlike, his mobile mouth twisted to a snarl. Dubosc stood aside in watchful calculation until against the angry red sunrise in which they floated there flashed the naked red gleam of steel. Then he stepped between.

"Enough. Fenayrou, put up that knife."

"The dog kicked me."

"You were at fault," said Dubosc sternly. "Perroquet!"

"Are we all to die that he may sleep?" stormed The Parrot.

"The harm is done. Listen now, both of you.

Things are bad enough already. We may need all our energies. Look about."

They looked and saw the far, round horizon and the empty desert of the sea and their own long shadows that slipped slowly before them over its smooth, slow heaving, and nothing else. The land had sunk away from them in the night—some one of the chance currents that sweep among the islands had drawn them none could say where or how far. The trap had been sprung.

"Good God, how lonely it is!" breathed Fenayrou in a hush.

No more was said. They dropped their quarrel. Silently they shared their rations as before, made shift to eat something with their few drops of water, and sat down to pit themselves one against another in the vital struggle that each could feel was coming—a sort of tacit test of endurance.

A calm had fallen as it does between trades in this flawed belt, an absolute calm. The air hung weighted. The sea showed no faintest crinkle, only the maddening, unresting heave and fall in polished undulations on which the lances of the sun broke and drove in under their eyelids as white, hot splinters; a savage sun that kindled upon them with the power of a burning glass, that sucked the moisture from poor human bits of jelly and sent them crawling to the shelter of their mats and brought them out again, gasping, to shrivel anew. The water, the world of water, seemed sleek and thick as oil. They came to loathe it and the rotting smell of it, and when the doctor made them dip themselves overside they found little comfort. It was warm and sluggish, slimed. But a curious thing resulted. . . .

While they clung along the edge of the raft they all faced inboard, and there sat the black Canaque. He did

not join them. He did not glance at them. He sat hunkered on his heels in the way of the native, with arms hugging his knees. He stayed in his place at the stern, motionless under that shattering sun, gazing out into vacancy. Whenever they raised their eyes, they saw him. He was the only thing to see.

"Here is one who appears to enjoy himself quite well," remarked Dubosc.

"I was thinking so myself," said Fenayrou.

"The animal!" rumbled Perroquet.

They observed him, and for the first time with direct interest, with thought of him as a fellow being—with the beginning of envy.

"He does not seem to suffer."

"What is going on in his brain? What does he dream of there? One would say he despises us."

"The beast!"

"Perhaps he is waiting for us to die," suggested Fenayrou with a harsh chuckle. "Perhaps he is waiting for the reward. He would not starve on the way home at least. And he could deliver us—piecemeal."

They studied him.

"How does he do it, doctor? Has he no feeling?"

"I have been wondering," said Dubosc. "It may be that his fibres are tougher—his nerves."

"Yet we have had water and he none."

"But look at his skin, fresh and moist."

"And his belly, fat as a football!"

The Parrot hauled himself aboard.

"Don't tell me this black beast knows thirst!" he cried with a strange excitement. "Is there any way he could steal our supplies?"

"Certainly not."

"Then, name of a dog, what if he has supplies of his own hidden about?"

The same monstrous notion struck them all, and the others swarmed to help. They knocked the black aside. They searched the platform where he sat, burrowing among the rushes, seeking some hidden cache, another bottle or a gourd. They found nothing.

"We were mistaken," said Dubosc.

But Perroquet had a different expression for disappointment. He turned on the Canaque and caught him by the kinky mop of hair and proceeded to give him what is known as gruel in the cobalt mines. This was a little specialty of The Parrot's. He paused only when he himself was breathless and exhausted and threw the limp, unresisting body from him.

"There, lump of dirt! That will teach you. Maybe you're not so chipper now, my boy—*hein?* Not quite so satisfied with your luck. Pig! That will make you feel. . . ."

It was a ludicrous, a wanton, a witless thing. But the others said nothing. The learned Dubosc made no protest. Fenayrou had none of his usual jests at the garroter's stupidity. They looked on as at the satisfaction of a common grudge. The white trampled the black with or without cause, and that was natural. And the black crept away into his place with his hurts and his wrongs and made no sign and struck no blow. And that was natural too.

The sun declined into a blazing furnace whereof the gates stood wide, and they prayed to hasten it and cursed because it hung so long enchanted. But when it was gone their blistered bodies still held the heat like things incandescent. The night closed down over them like a purple bowl, glazed and impermeable. They would have divided the watches again, though none of them thought of sleep, but Fenayrou made a discovery.

"Idiots!" he rasped. "Why should we look and look? A whole navy of ships cannot help us now. If we are becalmed, why so are they!"

The Parrot was singularly put out.

"Is this true?" he asked Dubosc.

"Yes, we must hope for a breeze first."

"Then, name of God, why didn't you tell us so? Why did you keep on playing out the farce?"

He pondered it for a time. "See here," he said. "You are wise, eh? You are very wise. You know things we do not and you keep them to yourself." He leaned forward to peer into the doctor's face. "Very good. But if you think you are going to use that cursed smartness to get the best of us in any way—see here, my zig, I pull your gullet out like the string of an orange. . . . Like that. What?"

Fenayrou gave a nervous giggle and Dubosc shrugged, but it was perhaps about this time that he began to regret his intervention in the knife play.

For there was no breeze and there was no ship.

By the third morning each had sunk within himself, away from the rest. The doctor was lost in a profound depression, Perroquet in dark suspicion, and Fenayrou in bodily suffering, which he supported ill. Only two effective ties still bound their confederacy. One was the flask which Dubosc had slung at his side by a strip of wickerwork. Every move he made with it, every drop he poured, was followed with burning eyes. And he knew and he had no advantage of them in knowing that the will to live was working its relentless formula aboard that raft. Under his careful saving there still remained nearly half of their original store.

The other bond, as it had come to be by strange mutation, was the presence of the black Canaque.

There was no forgetting the fourth man now, no overlooking him. He loomed upon their consciousness, more formidable, more mysterious, more exasperating with every hour. Their own powers were ebbing. The naked savage had yet to give the slightest sign of complaint or weakness.

During the night he had stretched himself out on the platform as before, and after a time he had slept. Through the hours of darkness and silence while each of the whites wrestled with despair, this black man had slept as placidly as a child, with easy, regular breathing. Since then he had resumed his place aft. And so he remained, unchanged, a fixed fact and a growing wonder.

The brutal rage of Perroquet, in which he had vented his distorted hate of the native, had been followed by superstitious doubts.

"Doctor," he said at last, in awed huskiness, "is this a man or a fiend?"

"It is a man."

"A miracle," put in Fenayrou.

But the doctor lifted a finger in a way his pupils would have remembered.

"It is a man," he repeated, "and a very poor and wretched example of a man. You will find no lower type anywhere. Observe his cranial angle, the high ears, the heavy bones of his skull. He is scarcely above the ape. There are educated apes more intelligent."

"Ah? Then what?"

"He has a secret," said the doctor.

That was a word to transfix them.

"A secret! But we see him—every move he makes, every instant. What chance for a secret?"

The doctor rather forgot his audience, betrayed by chagrin and bitterness.

"How pitiful!" he mused. "Here are we three—children of the century, products of civilization—I fancy none would deny that, at least. And here is this man who belongs before the Stone Age. In a set trial of fitness, of wits, of resource, is he to win? Pitiful!"

"What kind of a secret?" demanded Perroquet, fuming.

"I cannot say," admitted Dubosc with a baffled gesture. "Possibly some method of breathing, some peculiar posture that operates to cheat the sensations of the body. Such things are known among primitive peoples—known and carefully guarded—like the properties of certain drugs, the uses of hypnotism and complex natural laws. Then, again, it may be psychologic—a mental attitude persistently held. Who knows? . . .

"To ask him? Useless. He will not tell. Why should he? We scorn him. We give him no share with us. We abuse him. He simply remains inscrutable—as he has always been and will always be. He never tells those innermost secrets. They are the means by which he has survived from the depth of time, by which he may yet survive when all our wisdom is dust."

"I know several very excellent ways of learning secrets," said Fenayrou as he passed his dry tongue over his lips. "Shall I begin?"

Dubosc came back with a start and looked at him.

"It would be useless. He could stand any torture you could invent. No, that is not the way."

"Listen to me," said Perroquet with sudden violence. "Me, I am wearied of the gab. You say he is a man. Very well. If he is a man, he must have blood in his veins. That would be, anyway, good to drink."

"No," returned Dubosc. "It would be hot. Also it would be salt. For food—perhaps. But we do not need food."

"Kill the animal then, and throw him over."

"We gain nothing."

"Well, sacred name, what do you want?"

"To beat him!" cried the doctor, curiously agitated. "To beat him at the game—that's what I want! For our own sakes, for our racial pride, we must, we must. To outlast him, to prove ourselves his masters. By better brain, by better organization and control. Watch him, watch him, friends—that we may ensnare him, that we may detect and defeat him in the end!"

But the doctor was miles beyond them.

"Watch?" growled The Parrot. "I believe you, old windbag. It is all one watch. I sleep no more and leave any man alone with that bottle."

To this the issue finally sharpened. Such craving among such men could not be stayed much longer by driblets. They watched. They watched the Canaque. They watched each other. And they watched the falling level in their flask—until the tension gave.

Another dawn upon the same dead calm, rising like a conflagration through the puddled air, cloudless, hopeless! Another day of blinding, slow-drawn agony to meet. And Dubosc announced that their allowance must be cut to half the thimbleful.

There remained perhaps a quarter of a liter—a miserable reprieve of bare life among the three of them, but one good swallow for a yearning throat.

At sight of the bottle, at the tinkle of its limpid content, so cool and silvery green inside the glass, Fenayrou's nerve snapped.

"More!" he begged, with pleading hands. "I die. More!"

When the doctor refused him, he groveled among the reeds, then rose suddenly to his knees and tossed his arms abroad with a hoarse cry.

"A ship! A ship!"

The others span about. They saw the thin, unbroken ring of this greater and more terrible prison to which they had exchanged; and that was all they saw, though they stared and stared. They turned back to Fenayrou and found him in the act of tilting the bottle. A cunning slash of his knife had loosed it from its sling at the doctor's side. . . . Even now he was sucking at the mouth, spilling the precious liquid——

With one sweep Perroquet caught up their paddle and flattened him, crushed him.

Springing across the prostrate man, Dubosc snatched the flask upright and put the width of the raft between himself and the big garroter who stood wide-legged, his bloodshot eyes alight, rumbling in his chest.

"There is no ship," said The Parrot. "There will be no ship. We are done. Because of you and your rotten promises that have brought us here—doctor, liar, ass!"

Dubosc stood firm.

"Come a step nearer and I break bottle and all over your head."

They stood regarding each other, and Perroquet's brows gathered in a slow effort of thought.

"Consider," urged Dubosc with his quaint touch of pedantry. "Why should you and I fight? We are rational men. We can see this trouble through and win yet. Such weather cannot last forever. Besides, here are only two of us to divide the water now."

"That is true," nodded The Parrot. "That is true, isn't it? Fenayrou kindly leaves us his share. An inheritance—what? A famous idea. I'll take mine now."

Dubosc probed him keenly.

"My share at once, if you please," insisted Perroquet, with heavy docility. "Afterwards we shall see. Afterwards."

The doctor smiled his grim and wan little smile.

"So be it."

Without relinquishing the flask, he brought out his canvas wallet once more—that wallet which replaced the professional black bag—and rolled out the thimble by some swift sleight of his flexible fingers while he held Perroquet's glance with his own.

"I will measure it for you."

He poured the thimbleful and handed it over quickly, and when Perroquet had tossed it off he filled again and again.

"Four—five," he counted. "That is enough."

But The Parrot's big grip closed quietly around his wrist at the last offering and pinioned him and held him helpless.

"No, it is not enough. Now I will take the rest. Ha, wise man! Have I fooled you at last?"

There was no chance to struggle and Dubosc did not try, only stayed smiling up at him, waiting.

Perroquet took the bottle.

"The best man wins," he remarked. "Eh, my zig? A bright notion of yours. The—best——"

His lips moved, but no sound issued. A look of the most intense surprise spread upon his round face. He stood swaying a moment, and collapsed like a huge hinged toy when the string is cut.

Dubosc stooped and caught the bottle again, looking down at his big adversary, who sprawled in a brief convulsion and lay still, a bluish scum oozing between his teeth. . . .

"Yes, the best man wins," repeated the doctor, and laughed as he in turn raised the flask for a draft.

"The best man wins!" echoed a voice in his ear.

Fenayrou, writhing up and striking like a wounded snake, drove the knife home between his shoulders.

The bottle fell and rolled to the middle of the platform, and there, while each strove vainly to reach it, it poured out its treasure in a tiny stream that trickled away and was lost.

It may have been minutes or hours later—for time has no count in emptiness—when next a sound proceeded from that frail slip of a raft, hung like a mote between sea and sky. It was a phrase of song, a wandering strain in half tones and fluted accidentals, not unmelodious. The black Canaque was singing. He sang without emotion or effort, quite casually and softly to himself. So he might sing by his forest hut to ease some hour of idleness. Clasping his knees and gazing out into space, untroubled, unmoved, enigmatic to the end, he sang—he sang.

And, after all, the ship came.

She came in a manner befitting the sauciest little tops'l schooner between Nukahiva and the Pelews—as her owner often averred and none but the envious denied—in a manner worthy too of that able Captain Jean Guilbert, the merriest little scamp that ever cleaned a pearl bank or snapped a cargo of labor from a scowling coast. Before the first whiff out of the west came the *Petite Suzanne,* curtsying and skipping along with a flash of white frill by her forefoot, and brought up startled and stood shaking her skirts and keeping herself quite daintily to windward.

"And 'ere they are sure enough, by dam!" said the polyglot Captain Jean in the language of commerce and profanity. "Zose passengers for us, hey? They been here all the time, not ten mile off—I bet you, Marteau. Ain't it 'ell? What you zink, by gar?"

His second, a tall and excessively bony individual of gloomy outlook, handed back the glasses.

"More bad luck. I never approved this job. And now—see—we have had our voyage for nothing. What misfortune!"

"Marteau, if that good Saint Pierre gives you some day a gold 'arp, still you would holler bad luck—bad job!" retorted Captain Jean. "Do I 'ire you to stand zere and cry about ze luck? Get a boat over, and quicker zan zat!"

"M. Marteau aroused himself sufficiently to take command of the boat's crew that presently dropped away to investigate. . . .

"It is even as I thought," he called up from the quarter when he returned with his report. "I told you how it would be, Captain Jean."

"Hey?" Captain Jean cried, bouncing at the rail. "Have you got those passengers yet, *enfant de salaud?*"

"I have not," said Marteau in the tone of lugubrious triumph. There was nothing in the world that could have pleased him quite so much as this chance to prove Captain Jean the loser on a venture. "We are too late. Bad luck, bad luck—that calm. What misfortune! They are all dead!"

"Will you mind your business?" shouted the skipper.

"But still the gentlemen are dead——"

"What is zat to me? All ze better, they will cost nozing to feed."

"But how——"

"Hogsheads, my gar," said Captain Jean paternally. "Zose hogsheads in the afterhold. Fill them nicely with brine, and zere we are!" And after having drawn all possible satisfaction from the other's amazement, he sprang the nub of his joke with a grin. "Ze gentlemen's passage is all paid, Marteau. Before we left Sydney, Marteau. I contrac' to bring back three escape' convicts and so by 'ell I do—in pickle! And now if you'll

kindly get zose passengers aboard like I said and bozzer less about ze goddam luck, I be much oblige'. Also, zere is no green on my eye, Marteau, and you can dam well smoke it!"

Marteau recovered himself with difficulty in time to recall another trifling detail. "There is a fourth man on board that raft, Captain Jean. He is a Canaque—still alive. What shall we do with him?"

"A Canaque?" snapped Captain Jean. "A Canaque! I had no word in my contrac' about any Canaque. . . . Leave him zere. . . . He is only a dam nigger. He'll do well enough where he is."

And Captain Jean was right, perfectly right, for while the *Petite Suzanne* was taking aboard her grisly cargo the wind freshened from the west, and just about the time she was shaping away for Australia the "dam nigger" spread his own sail of pandanus leaves and twirled his own helm of niaouli wood and headed the catamaran eastward, back toward New Caledonia.

Feeling somewhat dry after his exertions, he plucked at random from the platform a hollow reed with a sharp end and, stretching himself at full length in his accustomed place at the stern, he thrust the reed down into one of the bladders underneath and drank his fill of the sweet water. . . .

He had a dozen such storage bladders remaining, built into floats at intervals above the water line—quite enough to last him safely home again.

THE OLD WOMAN[1]

Isabel Hopestill Carter

Young Caroline trod majestically into the sunny parlor, balancing on her head a round brown box. This was a scheme to attract the attention of old Caroline and lead up naturally to the matter of suggesting the charming box as a token of esteem from the old to the young. However, old Caroline was both unseeing and, in the main, unseen, for two veiny hands held outspread before her the Bath *Daily Times;* her feet, bony and jointy in those thin leather shoes that old women manage to buy somewhere, rested flatly on a red wooden footstool that served her comfort when she sat at the window in the high-backed rocker; her lean old legs were draped in a cotton gown printed with red forget-me-nots. The light, striking through a single thickness of paper, revealed the fact that she studied the inside of the back page, devoted to news of Boothbay, Popham, Winnegance, Woolwich, Wiscasset, and Dresden. The breeze from the Kennebec rustled the curtain against the paper; there was no other sound.

Baffled, young Caroline flung herself on the old sofa, resting her neck on the back and stretching long legs out into the middle of the hideous carpet. Idly she polished the flat box on her thigh and contemplated the familiar Bailey gods. The carpet; on the opposite wall the oil painting, not so bad as some, of the ship *Mary Spaulding,* and a print, in a chipped green frame, of the bark *Are-*

[1]Reprinted from *The Atlantic Monthly,* by permission of the author and the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly.*

thusa; a cut-velvet picture and a little mirror in a mahogany frame with an intricately cut outline; a round framed photograph of Winchester Cathedral and another of an Indian temple. On the white mantel there were two beautiful Chinese vases and, in sociable juxtaposition, a large and sinfully ugly red-pottery pig which held a mass of goldenglow; an old fat Buddha sat there, too, beside a sandglass. Above young Caroline's dark head hung a gilt-framed mirror with a colored farm scene at its top, a mirror known to be capable of performing wonders in the way of distorting even the most symmetrical features. The chairs were old and severe, and thoroughly disapproved of a black-and-silver lacquered table that gleamed wanton from a corner.

Somewhere a clock in a great hurry banged six times in bursts of two. Old Caroline began a struggle to get the paper to collapse into its creases; the accursed single sheet in the middle seized the opportunity to slide out and skid across the floor, only to be captured and returned to the fold by young Caroline. Old Caroline vented small irritated sounds while she strove with the frenzied *Times,* but, at last subduing it with some well-placed blows, she laid it on the arm of the sofa and folded her hands on her beflowered stomach. She became aware of young Caroline alert in the offing.

"Oh!" she said. "Where's Joel?"

"He's out on the porch. Look, Aunt Caroline, may I have this box? I found it in that bureau in my room. It hasn't anything in it but some old hat-trimming." She crushed it to her breast, wrenching off the tight cover. "Those were pretty little birds. Look, auntie." Old Caroline, stretching a shaky hand, took the box into her lap. There were three dried skins of birds, with heads iridescent and gorgeous; one imagined them rushing brilliantly from flower to flower in a tropic forest. She

smoothed their shining crowns, the two that were splendidly green and the one that was brown with a golden cap.

"Did you have them on one of those absurd hats people used to wear?" inquired young Caroline. "They look like real birds, don't they? I don't see how anyone could put them on a hat."

"Hat!" Old Caroline's voice was faintly surprised. Her eyes were dreamy. "No, I never had them on a hat——" A long silence fell. She sat very still in the tall black rocker with the little long-dead birds in her old hand and the round brown box in her lap. She was old and serene; her thin gray hair was neatly disposed to cover as far as possible the pink scalp; her absent eyes were a faded blue, beset by a million wrinkles. Her life, one felt, had been placidly happy.

Old Caroline was young Caroline in that far time, and she had been married a year and three days. Hot and miserable and uncomfortable she lay on her back in the wide built-in bed with the thick posts reaching to the ceiling of the cabin; the light in the outer room dimly illumined the stateroom, and it gleamed on the brass rim of the compass bolted to the ceiling over the bed; the compass card bobbed and bobbed with the weary plunge of the ship. She could not read the compass and the light was faint, but it seemed to her that the card flopped back and forth and back and forth across the vertical black line that was the ship—back and forth, back and forth. With every aimless lunge in the swell she heard the lifeless flap of canvas and the jerk of heavy yards. On the poop deck just above her head the wheel creaked unceasingly, and the mate's soft footfalls padded across the deck and back, across and back, across and back; from time to time he stopped and she knew he leaned his elbows

on the house and stared at the stars and the dangling telltale and the lazy sails; then he began again his endless pacing. For an eternity she had heard these same noises.

The mate jogged down the starboard side. The man at the wheel began to sing softly—it must be Mads. Only yesterday morning when she went on deck she had found Mads at the wheel and had said to him, "Just a few days more, Mads!" He had looked quickly at her, and cast his vigilant blue eyes down at the compass, murmuring, "Yass, ma'am." Rise and fall, creak and groan, flap, flap. Even if they were a week later than Joel had estimated at the beginning as the very limit of a long passage, there would still be time for her. At dinner Mr. Adams and Joel no longer bothered to exchange their figures on the day's run, which was encouraging. But dinner itself was tiresome with the flour almost gone, the butter and sugar all gone, and beans their staple diet; Joel fumed like an old woman over the food. Well, it probably wasn't so good for the baby, but they would be arriving soon.

She rolled hotly over on her side and stared at Joel sitting under the hanging lamp. Every night he read like that. After they had finished reading aloud from the sea-worn green Shakespeare and she had gone to bed, he still sat out there and read. Now he leaned back, gazing across the cabin with knitted brows. As she watched he half closed the book to feel in a pocket for a pipe, and she recognized the tan leather cover of the book. Old Bowditch! Why, he must know old Bowditch by heart!

"Oh, Joel!" she called softly. He started. "What are you doing?"

"Reading."

"What are you reading?"

"Oh—*A Midsummer Night's Dream,*" he responded.

She was on the point of remarking in her surprise that the Shakespeare was green, but it hardly seemed worth while. It was doubtless some joke of Joel's.

"Will you get me a drink, Joel? I'm so hot." He rose instantly, laying the book on the wide arm of the chair, unconscious of her observation. Why, that wasn't old Bowditch, either; old Bowditch had a broken back sewed up with a string. What was that book? She rolled back into her own corner as Joel stepped back from the forward cabin with the water. She had seen it somewhere, a thick tan book with a wide red name-piece on the back binding. She drank the warmish water gratefully. Joel was a good boy to her, but if she had known that a bridal trip around the world would end in discomfort like this——

That was the medicine book! That was what he read every night with such grimness.

It explained everything. Over on the chart table the chart, which used to be held open all the time with the parallel rulers and the dividers and the corner of the chronometer, lay curled up tight in the provoking way of charts, discouraging to investigation. So Joel thought it was going to happen at sea. She was frightened. . . .

Old Caroline rubbed the box. "The comprador gave it to me in Shanghai," she said. "On my wedding trip. It had a beautiful silk-embroidered handkerchief in it. A big silk handkerchief, a yard square, I guess, embroidered in flowers, soft and lovely. I kept Joel's father's watch in it, which Joel prized. He never used it at sea, of course. It wasn't much good, anyway."

It turned out to be a rather good baby, not very big, but very slippery. Caroline found herself constantly snatching him just in the nick of time by a fat leg or an

arm; but he was perfectly good-natured about that and about almost everything except his meals. Joel became a very clever nurse in a short time, and exhibited his son to the mate and the second mate. The steward begged permission to take him out to show to the men, and as he claimed to be an adept in the dandling of babies—one pictured him as juggling three or four babies at once, keeping them constantly in motion in the air without the least slip—the favor was granted and he withdrew, carrying the little red pig in a comfortingly professional manner. He returned in triumph, bearing gifts and compliments and promises of more gifts. Ben had almost completed a particularly neat Turk's head. Old Bill had presented an Alaskan salmon-spear, five feet long. The carpenter had begun forthwith on a labyrinthine rattle; Tom was doing some wood-carving, and very mysterious he was about it, too—the steward thought, sniffing, that it was going to be a doll. The bo's'n, ready for any occasion, presented a very useful walrus tusk. A pair of ivory dice, loaded, had been rejected by the steward, in his official capacity, as an unsuitable gift for a moral infant.

Joel set the baby down in the log-book with the utmost exactness as to latitude and longitude. He marked a red star in the margin opposite the entry.

In a few days Joel calmed down after his ordeal and Caroline began to recover somewhat from hers. Then, for no apparent reason, everyone got into a state of nerves. Caroline, not greatly interested, suspected that some old wretch of a seaman in a bad temper had said babies on a ship brought mean weather, and so all the silly sailors were wrought up over that. Certainly the sails still slatted and pounded, the ship lumbered about, and, though they were far beyond the equator, it grew hotter day by day. Caroline could not sleep much for the heat and

the requirements of her offspring, and Joel seemed not to sleep at all. Repeatedly at night he went on deck "to get a breath of air."

One day Caroline took a short walk. It had been excessively hot in the cabin, but nevertheless she felt rather well, as she had not suffered any nervous shocks that day from having her little greased pig try to elude her and dash his ten-day-old brains on the deck. So she wobbled along through the forward cabin to the high doorsill that kept the bad-weather seas from rolling across the main deck and making themselves unwelcome in the cabin. This obstacle she awkwardly surmounted, stepping across the grating outside on to the deck. It was like a griddle; the black stuff between the planks oozed up soft and gummy and stuck to her shoes. The broiling sun menaced her, and her legs unhappily turned to macaroni. Her dazzled eyes were caught by a group of men on the fo'c'sle doing some extraordinary thing with the big boat—painting it, perhaps. As she turned to flee from the glare to the dimness of the cabin she saw in the mizzen rigging a long string of limp gay flags—there was probably a ship in sight. Possibly they were going to borrow some potatoes or something. She reached the haven of the big chair just as Joel's deliberate steps sounded on the companionway stairs.

"I went on deck, Joel," she volunteered, much elated. "But it was so hot I didn't stay." He filled a pipe, sitting down on the ugly red divan. His glance at her as he sucked the flame of the match down to the bowl of the pipe was very gentle.

"Is there a ship near?" she pursued. Joel might sit there for a year and not think to tell her! "I saw the flags. Are you speaking her?"

"No," he answered slowly. "It's only a signal. The ship is on fire, Caroline."

It came like a blow; for a moment it seemed impossible that those quiet words had actually been uttered. Her eyes grew to be huge blue spots on the pallor of her face —staring blue spots. "Don't be frightened, dear," he murmured. (Her pride, indignant, administered a sharp prod to her courage. "Anybody who can have babies at sea can be shipwrecked creditably," it admonished. She must say some bold words.)

"Shall—shall we have to leave the ship?" she quavered. ("Now, could there be a more idiotic question?" remonstrated pride. "Everyone will think you are a fool and a coward besides.")

"The hatches are battened down," he replied. She did not know what that meant. "But I think we'll have to abandon the ship to-night or to-morrow. You'd better get a few things together. This isn't what I would have chosen for a wedding trip for you, Caroline!" The cry broke unexpectedly through his teeth, and he dropped his head in his big brown hands. His pipe fell and scattered embers about. "I am so sorry," he muttered, struggling to regain his admirable calm.

"There, there, Joel," she comforted. "I don't mind." ("Now that sounds better," remarked her pride to her courage; "shipwrecks are nothing to babies.")

So she gathered a few things. She arrayed herself in her best black silk, made for her wedding outfit, according to the traditional New England custom. She took the round wooden box containing Joel's father's watch carefully folded in the rich silk handkerchief. She collected a few meager supplies for the baby, some vaseline and what not. Then a brown cashmere shawl, and she was ready—tremendously composed, she flattered herself, with her hands and knees trembling and her heart pounding her to bits. Joel was making some leisurely preparations, too; he put together in a neat pile his sextant, some

instruments, a chart, a few bottles from the medicine chest, the green Shakespeare and old Bowditch, a big new oil-skin coat from the slop chest, the ship's papers, the log-book.

"What do you take Shakespeare for?" babbled Caroline.

"Why, I take it everywhere!" responded faithful old Joel.

All the afternoon Caroline listened to strange sounds of preparations, holding her fat pig in her arms for fear she might abandon ship and forget him, not having had him so long as Joel had had that old green book. The steward came and went in the pantry, and Joel conversed briefly with him in low tones about condensed milk and hard-tack. There were unusual creakings and thumpings outside the forward cabin windows, which Caroline, very erect and ready, opined to be related to the boat davits. She wondered how they'd get the boat down off the fo'c'sle. She would like to know how near the land they were, but she hesitated to ask lest Joel think her frightened; she was just as calm as anybody, she was sure. Calmer.

In the morning they took the final steps. Caroline sat for the last time on the poop in the barrel chair, with her baby and her bundle, like an immigrant woman, and watched everything. Three boats there were—Joel said that any one of them was as big, almost, as Christopher Columbus's ship, but Caroline knew better than to believe that. The second mate was the first to go; he came up, with the ship's cat under his arm, to say good-bye and to shake hands with Caroline. Joel gave him some sailing directions for the mainland.

"You can't miss it," he said. "Of course, it's farther than Juan Fernandez, but you can't navigate. You've got the younger men in your boat—you may have to push them some unless you get picked up. Mr. Adams and I will

make for Juan Fernandez." They shook hands, and presently the boat floated off from the side of the ship. Wisps and ribbons of smoke were coming through the deck near the main hatch. How far from land could they be, thought Caroline.

Men were dropping into the second boat. Mr. Adams shook hands with Caroline and the baby and with Joel. He had Joel's own chronometer in his hands, and he uttered a parting protest.

"The ship's is all right," responded Joel. "You will have to push your crew a little with your provisions. You may get picked up. If not, we'll see you later. Good luck!" The mate's old brown felt hat vanished. They must be a long, long way from land.

Two or three sailors got into the third boat. Joel took Caroline's bundle and the baby, and shortly she saw the bundle disappear over the rail. Joel gave the baby to Mads, and Caroline in a sudden frenzy of anxiety hastened to the side; but Mads managed the baby as if climbing up and down the tall sides of burning ships with slippery babies were the regular work of an able seaman. The sailors ran up and down like monkeys. Then it was Caroline's turn; she hated those up-and-down wiggly ladders.

She crouched on the rail, clinging to Joel's hand on one side and to a tarred black rope on the other, and peered outward and downward at a diminutive boat bouncing below and at the white specks that were the faces of seamen gazing up. At Joel's command one of these began to mount the ladder.

"Turn around, Caroline." That was the pinch—to let go of the things you had hold of and turn around quickly enough to snatch at them again with the other hand, and to go down that ladder backward with your

face to the black ship, like a woodpecker—terrifying. *"Turn around,* Caroline." She turned. She was successful; she clutched Joel with her right hand now, and stretched her foot down, down. Where was it going? Why didn't it light on something? Oh, there! "Take hold of the *ropes.* There—step down." This was an endless ladder. She tried to look down between the ladder and her body to find the next step but her skirt caught up on every step and she had to keep taking one hand off to brush it down decently. Why, she had put her black silk dress on over her gray one—how could she have done that? *"Keep hold of the rope!"*

The places for her feet were farther apart every time. Joel said something, but not to her. She lifted her face and saw him miles above her. "Go on, Caroline. Step down." She put her blind foot down, down—oh! A hand caught the feeling foot, pulled gently, and placed it on a step. A big red hand covered with shiny hair appeared below her own on the rope, and a gentle surrounding pressure told her that she did not have to finish her acrobatic feats alone—a red hand always beside her and an unseen hand that found a place for her nervous feet. If she ever went to sea again she would practise on ladders first. Another step, another, and her foot touched something hard that yet sank sickeningly under her—that was the boat. She turned enormous blue eyes over her shoulder, and many hands reached to steady her, and many grins greeted her from seamen who in their remarkable way seemed to be holding the boat to the ship's side by the palms of their hands.

Now she sat down in the stern of the boat, exhausted in mind and body. The baby, wrapped in the brown shawl, lay screaming energetically on the deck boards. There were five sailors. Why didn't Joel come? Where

was he? An uncle of Caroline's had gone down with his ship. Joel couldn't mean to stay on board! He had said once—— But it was all right, after all. There were still some men on board. Everywhere she looked now she saw little whiffs of smoke, just like a firecracker about to explode. Someone dropped an umbrella like a harpoon into the boat, and the sailors laughed gruffly. Four more sailors came down, monkeylike, and then they waited. Then two more. After an interminable time Joel descended the dangling ladder, as casually as he might a staircase, with some papers in one hand and a bundle under his arm.

"Shove off," he said.

The ship very soon was leaking gray mist all over like a smoky stove, and anon it leaped into flame, fire running up the tarred rigging, chasing the coloured flags that were not needed any longer to tell that the ship *Mary Spauling* was in peril by fire. Wood and rope and canvas, pitch and tar and oil—they make a gallant conflagration! Thick black smoke and orange flame! Suddenly Caroline wept. The poor ship! It was so small and forlorn, sitting there on the flat sea and burning up; and, even though it had behaved in a most untrustworthy way, a boat, just a plain boat with no cover, was in comparison utterly contemptible.

This boat had a mast and a small sail, but for a day or two there was no wind, only sun, and Joel made the men take turns laboring with four heavy oars. They were far from skillful at first, but after a little practice they managed very well, though not, to be sure, like a racing crew. They grunted a good deal, and during the day they became simply impossibly red in the face; but so did Caroline. Mads was a sort of officer and took turns with Joel sitting in the stern and steering. The boat barely moved. It rested on the light blue hot water like

a double boiler, and she and Joel and Mads and the fat pig and all the sailors were being steamed in it like rice; and swelling, too, like rice. The sky was the bright blue cover of the boiler, and the sun made one red-hot spot on the cover. When the wind at last came, it dried up everybody's face and hands, and the sun and wind together burned and cracked the skin like a paper put over a cake in the oven.

The first two or three days nothing happened. And after that nothing happened but the wind; however, Caroline had only fragmentary recollections of the later days. For a long time, for hours, she sat on the hard seat till she ached in every bone. Then she stood up; but it was difficult to keep her balance and it made her feel like Washington Crossing the Delaware, and tired her, too, and she sat down, laughing foolishly. No one else ever laughed. The sailors who were not rowing lolled about red and sweating; those who rowed waved back and forth and back and forth and gave out more gusts of heat to the already hot air. Caroline sat beneath her umbrella and peeped out at them surreptitiously and occasionally intercepted a returning stare. There was nothing to do. Time could scarcely be said to pass at all. It was hard to sit still so long on the wooden seat. Everyone edged about imperceptibly. Caroline shifted now to this position and now to another, and always a board or seam or edge began to dig into some piece of flesh until she simply had to move again. She tried sitting in the bottom of the boat, and all the hard places came most heavenly in different spots, so that she dozed against the edge of the seat until that hurt her back; and then she tried the seat once more. Oh, oh! Joel was the only one who had any change—except Mads and the baby and the sailors who rowed the boat. Joel stood up and took the sun in the glare of noonday; he sat down and figured and looked

at the chronometer and the chart, and he penciled a point on the chart and measured with the long-legged brass dividers and the parallel rulers; he scowled over the bright white paper. Mads steered and watched Joel, who hunched above the chart and pondered or else napped a little—the heat made one drowsy and the boards kept one awake. He talked in low tones to Mads, whose answers were all alike monotonous. "Yass, sir, I tink sso, ssir." Only a thousand times he said "Yasssir," and the *s*'s hissed like a wet finger on a flatiron. It made her sleepy.

After she had been nodding and waking and changing her position, dozing and waking, for hours, the sun was still high in the sky. Under the protection of the umbrella she fed the baby, giggling hysterically with that shelter toward the supposedly baffled company. It felt Mother Goose-ish; but, try as she would, the exact verses dealing with the woman who lived under an umbrella eluded her, though she recollected other surprising situations which had been ably recorded. She appealed to Joel. Joel, however, murmured that once when he was a wild young man, the second mate of the *Orion,* he had been in a Black Sea port, and he and another wild young second mate from another ship had gone on a jaunt to a neighboring beach to discover the truth of the rumor that men and women went in bathing together stark naked. Yes, they did. It was true. Very sensible and matter-of-course. For forty years Caroline remembered Joel sitting before her, brown and serious, with his old hat pulled low, staring at her and the fat pig and telling them that tale.

The tedium of heat and aches was broken at last by sunset and a repast of hard-tack with a meager dose of water. Joel bullied her to drink some condensed milk; just a little bit, he urged, because it was good for her and

the baby. Why was it good for her to drink something she loathed? He wasn't a doctor. She would not; and then she did. The awful bluish sweetness that made her so thirsty—*gulp, gul-lup*—two choking spoonfuls. Ugh! She gnawed on the hard-tack like a dog on a bone; she kept a bit in her lap and crunched it from time to time. In the middle of the night she chewed on it and tried to sleep. She could not get comfortable lying down on the boards, for they were not the right shape, and she was not comfortable anywhere because her bones and her figure were always in the way. It was terribly public, too, and what good was an umbrella that bounded out of one's hand if one dozed off when one sat and was quite inadequate when one lay? Joel slept and Mads sat at the tiller and crooned to the baby, who was trying to cry. Mads went away and Joel sat at the tiller. A hundred times in the night the wild animal she had borne screamed for food—he wasn't just a pig, but a ravening wolf—and she hid herself with him in the brown cashmere shawl and was thankful for the darkness.

A hot dawn and no wind. All day raged the struggle about the condensed milk. She threw a can overboard, which angered Joel, who called her a savage and a pig; so, contrite, she consumed three large nauseating spoonfuls, even to lapping the spoon, and fell to on her hard-tack to take away the vile taste.

She dozed and waked and held the baby, glistening with vaseline, on her lap under the umbrella in the fierce sunshine. The baby clamored to eat every living instant, so finally Joel held him, or Mads. Peering out from time to time from the shade of the shawl under which she sat on the bottom of the boat, she viewed an unnautical tableau; either Mads or Joel seated under an umbrella at the tiller ropes, cleverly balancing on his knees a disagreeable red infant that Joel strove to soothe with "Camp

Town Races" and to which Mads crooned, in the ribs and trucks of a once melodious voice, his repertoire of sad Scandinavian tunes. Whenever, after napping for an age, she wakened because the boards were so merciless and her legs had gone to sleep, she found the sun still standing overhead. Sometimes Joel whispered commands to the men, and behind her she heard their hoarse answering whispers. It was fantastic. Usually when Joel wanted something done he spoke firmly to the mate or to the second mate, and they at once sped roaring up and down the deck and the men ran and shouted, "Aye, aye, sir," and "A-all fast!" and there was no secrecy or whispering whatever, and one realized with a thrill how powerful Joel was. Maybe it might be silly for Joel to bellow like a bull to the men in such a small boat, but at the same time it would make the boat seem bigger, particularly if one did not look over one's shoulder. However, it might wake the baby. He lay for the moment on the brown shawl beside her while Joel scratched in the log; he was like a chicken ready to roast, with his poor fat legs cramped up. In a burst of pity for his discomfort Caroline bent over and straightened his legs, but as soon as she removed her hand they doubled up again; moreover, the touch of her hand seemed to remind him of something and he began to whimper.

The days were hard to tell apart.

Again and again she roused from a heavy dream in a panic of fear that she had somehow lost Joel; frantic, she popped her head from the enshrouding shawl, opening her eyes suddenly in the light. But always he was there, an awful spectacle indeed, cheering her with a grimace of a grin. He looked the master, silent, sure; he was burned and haggard, his lips were parched, a scraggly beard flourished exceedingly upon his countenance, but his red narrowed eyes restlessly searched the horizon, watched

the sail, squinted over the dazzling chart. All was yet well. Then, blinded either by the sun or by Joel's shining presence, she slipped back into the shadows.

Nothing was continuous. She wakened—a picture flashed on the screen and was gone. Rarely she spoke.

Once she saw Joel leaning toward Mads, who held the baby on his lap and a condensed-milk can in one hand, and tried to dribble a little milky substance into the pink yelling mouth of that wild animal, who flourished tiny hands and kicked his red legs in a temper monumental for his size. Two, or perhaps more, sailors hovered just behind her, watching.

"He ain't like it," commented Mads hoarsely. His conclusion seemed completely accurate. Joel grunted.

"I don't like it either," whispered Caroline in an effort to justify her son's peculiarities. "I hate it, too." Several pairs of eyes turned to her, red-rimmed eyes in hairy faces.

"It's all there is, Caroline," she heard Joel reply as the picture faded away.

Another time she saw almost the same scene save that the baby was sucking voraciously on a wisp of grayish rag dabbled frequently into the glittering can.

"I don't believe it's good for him," muttered Joel.

"He ain't got the teeth for hard-tack, sir," submitted a remote voice which resembled that of the donor of the Alaskan salmon-spear.

Again, in the passage of days, Caroline came to herself, an anxious parent, and whispered an inquiry of Joel as to whether someone had attended to her child's diapers.

"We got 'em trailing on the end of a line," reported that reliable sea dog and, straining, she glimpsed indeed a patch of white leaping in the wavering path of the boat.

"Salt water," she protested. "I think it will hurt his poor legs." But Joel patted her hand and she drifted off again to where her mother was making gingerbread in the breezy kitchen in Wicasset.

Days and days and days. . . .

She dreamed that she was sitting on the splintery yellow kitchen floor in the bright warm oblong beside the screen door, and a big bad fly was on the outside, buzzing, and pushing to get in—no, a hand was pressing on her shoulder and a familiar croak called to her.

"Caroline! Caroline! An island!" She was still in the boat. She opened her heavy eyes and blinked, but there was no island to be seen. No island. None at all. She put her head down once more, but the inexorable voice went on and on—a voice with a hint of authority.

"Caroline! Wake up! It's an island—for you and baby and everybody! For the baby. Oh, yes, for the baby. She had almost forgotten him. He had cried all day and all night and had been as bad as beans, but he was good now; he heard about the island. "Where?" she moved her stiff lips soundlessly.

"Starboard bow," said Joel's voice, quite close. Was starboard right or left? And if one looked toward the back of the boat, where was it then? She raised her head and peered at the dazzling tin-can sea with a strip of paper unrolling along it. There was no island. Joel was crazy. But he was so persistent.

"It's Juan Fernandez!" His husky whisper slid away from her, but his hand was inescapably tight on her bony shoulder. "Robinson Crusoe's island. Listen, dear, we can get to Valparaiso and take a steamer home to Bath." Robinson Crusoe was in a bright blue book with gilt letters, on the top shelf; he was the man who was cast away on a desert island with savages and goats. He tamed the goats and milked the savages—on Friday. No, he

milked the savages and tamed the goats on Friday. He made him a coat of an old nanny-goat, and what do you s'pose made him do so? The baby might like goat's milk better than condensed milk in a shiny can with a blue cow on the label—he was so unreasonable—but if there were milk only on Friday and he wanted milk every minute——

Joel mumbled on and on and pinched her shoulder.

"Look *forward!*" He turned her reluctant chin. There it was! It was a vision of mountain tops and green trees rising from a shining sea, cool trees and bushes. Shade and a desert island—a better place for women to live in than the seclusion of an umbrella in an open boat with many men. She remembered the piece of hard-tack in her hot hand and lifted it to her lips, grinding it feebly with her teeth; it hurt her face to open her mouth even a little. For a while she stared at a delightful dark spot in a bright universe; it was at her right, a short distance off. Presently she made it out to be the umbrella, under which sat a fearful reddish giant covered with golden hair, with her own amiable little pig on his knee. A maternal jealousy stirred her.

"I want to hold him," she whispered. Joel's hand bit into her shoulder, and he did not answer.

"He iss assleep now, ma'am," Mads hissed at her. "If I moof him, he cries, maybe."

"He doesn't like me!" she lamented. "He's a bad boy."

"Sssh, sssh!" reproved Joel. "He's been a good boy, and we are taking him to Robinson Crusoe's island. A feller should be older when he goes to sea." He achieved a ragged, gasping laugh.

"When he grows up——" began Caroline; but she was tired of talking and forgot what she had had in mind to say.

Juan Fernandez was a pleasant place to rest. She had a canvas hammock made from the lifeboat's sail stretched under the trees that smelled like sandalwood. She lay in the shade and was contented. The wind blew on her steadily, and the sun shone only in little patches through the leaves. The pretty sunshine. There were millions and millions of goats and quantities of strong milk and coarse meat and fish and fruit; there were a few curious people who seemed eager to get her what she wanted, though really all she wanted was to lie in the shade and watch the flowers and the birds, as swift and bright as fireflies; some were bright brown with gold heads, and others, more beautiful still, were royally green, and their heads shone with a greenish golden crown. They were prettier than any of the birds in Bath. She lay in her hammock or sat in the heavenly shade and reached out unsuccessfully to pat the swift things when they flew near.

When she came away, an old woman of the island, expecting to please, gave her the dried skins of three of those little birds. The poor dead pretties. . . .

"You haven't told me a thing!" complained young Caroline. "Not one thing! You said there was a handkerchief in the box! Where did the birds come from? And where's the handkerchief and Uncle Joel's father's watch?"

"He was only a little baby, you know," murmured old Caroline, faded eyes fixed on the past; "and Joel wrapped him in the handkerchief—to bury him."

In the old parlor the curtains blew in and out, and the pattern of the many-paned windows lay bright on the heathenish carpet. Old Caroline dreamed of her wedding trip, and young Caroline beat her restless feet on a stupid rug and was fiercely discontented with the present.

"How old were you then?" she burst out, hoping against hope.

"Why, I was twenty-four, I guess. No, maybe I was twenty-five," old Caroline replied, frowning and calculating. Young Caroline snorted bitterly.

"I'm *thirty-two!* I've never been anywhere except to New York and Boston and Philadelphia! There aren't any sea captains for *me* to marry and I'll never have enough money to go anywhere—*anywhere!*"

"It isn't anything much to go places," said old Caroline remotely.

SIR WATSON TYLER[1]

HARVEY O'HIGGINS

TYLER, Sir Watson, K. C. B., b. Coulton, Ont., May 24, 1870; ed. pub. schools, Univ. of Toronto, grad. 1891; m. Alicia Janes, 1893. Pres. Coulton Street Ry. Co., Coulton Gas and Electric Co., Farmer's Trust Co., Mechanics' Bank of Canada, Janes Electric Auto Co., etc. Donor Coulton Conservatory of Music, Mozart Hall, etc. Founder Coulton Symphony Orchestra, Beethoven Choir, etc. Conservative leader. Senate, 1911. Privy Council, Minister without portfolio, 1912. Knighted 1915 for services to the Empire.

Canada's Men of Mark.

THE stairs that Wat descended——

(He had been christened "Wat", not "Watson." He made it "Watson" later. I am writing of the fall of 1892, when he was twenty-odd years old.)

The stairs that Wat descended on that crucial Sunday morning had been designed by an architect who had aspired to conceal the fact that they were, after all, stairs. He had disguised them with cushioned corner-seats and stained-glass windows, with arches of fretwork and screens of spindles, with niches and turns and exaggerated landings, until they were almost wholly ornamental and honorific. They remained, however, stairs—just as the whole house remained a house in spite of everything that had been done to make it what *The Coulton Advertiser* called a "prominent residence." And to Wat, that morn-

[1]Reprinted from *From the Life*, by Harvey O'Higgins, by and with permission of and special arrangement with the author, Harper & Brothers, and the editors of *Harper's Magazine*.

ing, those stairs were painfully nothing but stairs, leading him directly from a bedroom which he had been reluctant to leave down to a dining-room which he was loath to enter. In the bedroom, since daylight, he had been making up his mind to tell his family something that must soon be told them. He had decided to tell them at the breakfast-table; and he could have forgiven the architect if the stairs had been a longer respite than they were.

In a dining-room that had been made as peevish with decoration as the stairs he found his father, his mother, and his two sisters already busy with breakfast and a Sunday paper, which in those early days of Coulton was imported across the border from Buffalo. His sisters were both younger than he and both pertly independent of their elders, and they did not look up from the illustrated sections of fashion and the drama which they were reading, aside, as they ate. His father seemed always to seize on his hours of family leisure to let his managerial brain lounge and be at rest in the comfortable corpulence of his body; he was stirring his coffee in a humorous reflectiveness that was wholly self-absorbed. Mrs. Tyler smiled apprehensively at her son, but she did not speak. She did not care to disturb the harmony of the domestic silence. Both the harmony and the silence were rare and pleasant to her.

Wat sat down, and humped himself over his fruit, and began to eat with an evident lack of zest. The dining-room maid came and went rustling. Mrs. Tyler brushed at a persistent crumb among the ribbons on the ample bosom of her morning wrapper, and regarded Wat from time to time with maternal solicitude.

He had once been a delicate, fat boy—before he took a four-years' course in college athletics—and she had never been quite convinced of the permanency of his conversion to health. He had come home late the previous night,

and he looked pale to her. His lack of appetite was unusual enough to be alarming. He did not begin his customary Sunday morning dispute with his sisters about "hogging" the picture pages of the newspaper.

She broke out at last. "What is it, Wat? Aren't you well?"

"N-no," he stammered, taken by surprise. "I'm all right."

His sisters glanced at him. He was unthinkingly afraid that they might see his secret in his eyes. They had all the devilish penetration of the young female. And he looked down his nose into his coffee-cup with an ostentatious indifference to them as he drank.

Naturally they accepted his manner as a challenge to them. Millie remarked to Ollie that he seemed thin—which was far from being true. Ollie replied, with her eyes on her newspaper, that he was probably going into a "decline." He pretended to pay no attention to them; but his mother interfered, as they had expected her to.

"You've no business, now, making fun of Wat about his health," she said. "You know he isn't strong. He's big—but he's soft."

"Soft!" the girls screamed. "Paw, maw says Wat's soft!"

It *is* incredible, but—at that day, to everybody in the household except his mother—Sir Watson Tyler was a joke. And it *is* incredible, but—in spite of all the honorable traditions of convention to the contrary—these were the family relations of the Tyler home.

Mr. Tyler turned an amused eye on his wife, and she appealed to him with her usual helpless indignation. "Well, I think you ought to speak to the girls, Tom. I don't think it's very nice of them to make fun of their mother."

"But, maw!" Millie laughed. "You say such funny things we can't help it."

"I don't. You twist everything I say. Wat *isn't* strong. You ought to be ashamed of yourselves."

She scolded them in a voice that was unconvincing, and they replied to her as if she were an incompetent governess for whom they had an affectionate disrespect.

Wat began to fortify himself with food for the announcement which he had to make. He ate nervously—determinedly—even, at last, doggedly His mother retired into silence. His sisters continued to read.

When they got to discussing some of the society news, he saw an opportunity of leading up to his subject; and when they were talking of a girl whom they had met during the summer at the lake shore, he put in, "Did you ever meet Miss Janes there?"

They turned their heads without moving their shoulders. "Lizzie Janes?" The tone was not enthusiastic. He cleared his throat before he answered, "Yes."

Millie said, superbly casual: "Uh-huh. Isn't she a *freak!*"

His face showed the effort he made to get that remark down, though he swallowed it in silence. His mother came to his rescue. "Who is she, Wat?"

"A girl I met this summer. I went over there with Jack Webb."

His sisters found his manner strained. They eyed him with suspicion. His mother asked, "What is she like?"

"Well," Millie put in, "she has about as much style——!"

Wat reddened. "She hasn't *your* style, anyway. She doesn't look as if her clothes——"

He was unable to find words to describe how his sisters

looked. They looked as if their limp garments had been poured cold over their shoulders and hung dripping down to their bone-thin ankles.

"I'm glad you like her," Millie said. "She's a sight."

He had been determined to be politic. It was essential that he should be politic. Yet he, the future leader of a conservative party, retorted: "It'd do you good to know a few girls like her. The silly crowd *you* go with!"

"Lizzie Janes! That frump!"

He appealed to his mother. "I certainly think *you* ought to call on them, mother. They've been mighty good to me this summer while you were away."

"Well, Wat," she said, "if you wish it——"

"You'll do no such thing!" Millie cried.

The squabble that followed did not end in victory for Wat. It was Millie's contention that they were not bound to receive every "freak" that he might "pick up"; and Mrs. Tyler—who, in social matters, was usually glad to remain in the quiet background of the family—put herself forward inadequately in Wat's behalf. She succumbed to her husband's decision that she "had better leave it to the girls"; he ended the dispute indifferently by leaving the table; and Wat realized, with desperation, that he had failed in his diplomatic attempt to engage the family interest for Miss Janes by introducing mention of her and her virtues into the table talk.

II

He went back upstairs to his bedroom and locked himself in with his chagrin and his sentimental secret. It was a secret that showed in a sort of gloomy wistfulness as he stood gazing out the glass door that opened, from one angle of his room, upon a little balcony—an ornamental balcony whose turret top adorned a corner of the Tyler

roof with an aristocratically useless excrescence. You will notice it in the picture of "Sir Watson Tyler's Boyhood Home" in *The Canadian Magazine's* article about him. From the door of this balcony, looking over the autumn maples of the street, through a gap between the opposite houses, Wat could see the chimney of the Janes house.

It was a remarkable pile of bricks, that chimney. All around it were houses that existed only as neighbors to that one supreme house. And around those were still others, less and less important, containing the undistinguished mass of lives that made up the city of Coulton in which she lived. The heart of interest in Coulton had once been his own home—as, for example, when he came back to it from college for his holidays. Now, when he returned in the evenings from his father's office he found himself on the circumference of a circle of which Miss Janes's home was the vital center. He saw his own room merely as a window looking toward hers. And this amazing displacement had been achieved so imperceptibly that he had only just become acutely conscious of it himself.

His mother and sisters had spent the summer on the clay-lipped lake shore that gave the name of "Surfholm" to the Tyler cottage in the society news of *The Coulton Advertiser;* and Wat and his father had remained in town, from Mondays to Saturdays, to attend to the real estate and investment business that supplied the Tyler income. (They also owned the Coulton horse-car line, but it supplied no income for them.) On a memorable Tuesday evening Wat had "stopped in" at the Janeses' on his way down-town with his friend Webb, to let Webb return to Miss Janes some music that he had borrowed. And, by a determining accident of fate, as they approached the lamplit veranda of the Janes cottage, Alicia Janes

was sitting behind the vine-hung lattice, reading a magazine, while her mother played the piano.

Observe: There was no veranda on the Tyler "residence"; no one ever sat outdoors there; and no one ever played anything but dance-music on the Tyler piano. Alicia Janes looked romantic under the yellow light, in the odor of flowers, with the background of green leaves about her. Her mother had more than a local reputation as a teacher of music, and the melody that poured out of the open French windows of the parlor was eloquent, impassioned, uplifting. The introductions were made in a low voice, so as not to disturb the music, and it was in silence that Alicia put out a frank hand to Wat and welcomed him with the strong grasp of a violinist's fingers.

Wat's ordinary tongue-tied diffidence went unnoticed under these circumstances. He was able to sit down without saying anything confused or banal. The powerful music, professionally interpreted, filled him with stately emotions, to which he moved and sat with an effect of personal dignity and repose.

These may seem to be details of small importance. But life has a way of concealing its ominous beginnings and of being striking only when its conclusions are already foregone. So death is more dramatic, but less significant, than the unperceived happenings that end in death. And in the seemingly trivial circumstances of Wat's introduction to the Janes veranda there were hidden the germs of vital alterations for him—alterations that were to affect the life of the whole community of Coulton, and, if the King's birthday list is to be believed, were to be important even to the British Empire.

Alicia Janes was dressed in a belted black gown, like an art student, with a starched Eton collar and cuffs. Instead of the elaborate coiffure of the day's style she

wore her dark hair simply parted and coiled low on her neck in a Rossetti mode. Her long olive face would have been homely if it had not been for her eyes. They welcomed Wat with the touching smile of a sensitive independence, and he did not notice that her lips were thin and her teeth prominent. In dress and manner she was unlike any of the young women whom he had met in the circle of his sisters' friends; if she had been like them, the memory of past embarrassments would probably have inhibited every expression of his mind. Her surroundings were different from any to which he had been accustomed; and, as a simple consequence, he was quite unlike himself in his accustomed surroundings. Perhaps it was the music most of all that helped him. It carried him as a good orchestra might carry an awkward dancer, uplifted into a sudden confident grace.

When she asked him some commonplace questions in an undertone, he replied naturally, forgetting himself. He listened to the music and he looked at her, seriously thrilled. When Webb asked her if she wouldn't play the violin, and she replied that she always played badly before strangers, Wat begged her in a voice of genuine anxiety not to consider him a stranger. She said, "I'll play for you the next time you come." And he was so grateful for the implied invitation to come again that his "Thank you" was sincere beyond eloquence. He even met her mother without embarrassment, although Mrs. Janes was an enigmatic-looking, dark woman with a formidable manner. She became more friendly when she understood that he was the son of the Tylers of Queen's Avenue, and he felt that he was accepted as a person of some importance, like herself. That was pleasant.

After a half-hour on the veranda he went on downtown with Webb, as calm outwardly as if he had parted

from old friends and so deeply happy in the prospect of seeing her again that he was quite unaware of what had happened to him. The following afternoon he telephoned to her eagerly. And he was back with her that night for hours in the lamplight, among the vines—without Webb—talking, smiling, and listening with profound delight while she played the violin to her mother's piano.

And there was an incredible difference between Wat on the veranda and Wat at home. Under his own roof he was a large-headed, heavy-shouldered, apparently slow-witted youth, who read in his room, exercised alone in a gymnasium which he had put in his attic during a college vacation, wrote long letters to former classmates in other cities, and, going out to the postbox, mooned ponderously around the streets till all hours. He had never anything much to say. Although he never met anyone if he could avoid it, and suffered horribly in a drawing-room, he was—like most shy men—particular to the point of effeminacy about his appearance. He bathed and shaved and brushed his hair and fussed over his clothes absurdly, morning and night. He was, in fact, in many ways ridiculous.

On the Janes veranda he was nothing of the sort. As the son of the owner of the Coulton street-car line and the Tyler real estate, he was a young man of social importance in a home where the mother earned a living by teaching music and the daughter had only the prospect of doing the same. He was a man of the practical world, whose opinions were authoritative. He was well dressed and rather distinguished looking, with what has since been called a "brooding forehead." He was fond of reading, and he had the solid knowledge of a slow student who assimilated what he read. Alicia deferred to him with an inspiring trust in his wisdom and his experience. She deferred even to his judgment in music—for which, it

transpired, he had an acute ear and a fresh appreciation. She played to him as eagerly as a painter might show his sketches to a wealthy enthusiast who was by way of becoming a collector. Their evenings together were full of interest, of promise, of talk and laughter, of serious conversation and melodic emotion.

There was in those days, in Coulton, no place of summer amusement to which a young pair could make an excuse of going in order to be together, so that Wat was never called on to make a public parade of his devotion. The best that he could do was to take Alicia to her church. But it was not *his* church. He was not known there. Mrs. Janes was the church organist; Alicia often added the music of her violin; and she always sat in the choir. Wat, in a back pew downstairs, was inconspicuous and not coupled with her. It was for these reasons that his interest in Miss Janes was not at once generally known. It was entirely accidental.

But it was not an accident that he did not make it known to his family. At first he foresaw and dreaded only the amusement of his sisters. Wat "girling"! What next! And then he shrank from the effect on Alicia Janes of getting his family point of view on him. It was almost if he had been romanticizing about himself and knew that his family would tell her the truth. And, finally, as guilty as if he were leading a double life, he confronted the problem that haunts all double lives—the problem of either keeping them apart or of uniting them in any harmony. As long as his family had been at "Surfholm" it had not been necessary that they should recognize Miss Janes, but, now that they were back in town, every day that they ignored her was an insult to her and an accusation of him.

He had to tell them. He had to put into words the beautiful secret of his feeling for her. "That freak!"

He had to introduce Alicia to his home and to the shame of his belittlement in his home, and let his contemptuous sisters disillusion her about him.

A horrible situation! Believe me or not, of a career so distinguished as Sir Watson's, this was the most crucial point, the most agonizing moment. It is not even hinted at in the official accounts of his career, yet never in his life afterwards was he to be so racked with emotion, so terrified by the real danger of losing everything in the world that could make the world worth living in. And never afterwards was he forced to choose a course that meant so much not only to himself, but to the world in which he lived.

III

That is why I have chosen this autumn Sunday of 1892 as the most notable day to scrutinize and chronicle in a character study of Sir Watson Tyler. I should like to commemorate every moment of it, but, as the memoir-writers say—when their material is running short—space forbids. You will have to imagine him trying to dress in order to take Miss Janes to church: struggling through a perspiring ecstasy of irresolution in the choice of a necktie, straining into a Sunday coat that made him look round-shouldered because of the bulging muscularity of his back, cursing his tailor, hating his hands because they hung red and bloated below his cuffs, hating his face, his moon-face, his round eyes, his pudding of a forehead, and all those bodily characteristics that were to mark him, to his later biographers, as a born leader among men, "physically as well as mentally dominant."

He never went to church, to his family's knowledge, so he had to wait until they had gone in order to avoid inconvenient questions. They were always late. He watched them, behind the curtain of his window, till they

rounded the circular driveway and reached the street. Five minutes later he was cutting across the lawn, scowling under a high hat that always pinched his forehead, on his way to the Janeses.

He did not arrive there. He decided that he was too late. He decided that he could not arrive there without having first made up his mind what to do. And he turned aside to wander through the residential streets of Coulton, pursued by the taunts of the church-bells. He came to the weed-grown vacant lots and the withered fields of market-gardeners in a northern suburb that was yet to be nicknamed "Tylertown." He ended beside Smith's Falls, where the Coulton River drops twenty feet over a ridge into the Coulton Valley; and he sat down on a rock, in his high hat, on the site of the present power-house—his power-house—that has put the light and heat of industrial life into the whole community. He resolved to see his mother privately, tell her the truth, get her to help him with his father, and let his sisters do their worst.

But it was not easy to see Mrs. Tyler privately in her home on Sunday. They had a long and solemn noon dinner that was part of the ritual of the day, and after dinner she always sat with her husband and her daughters in the sitting-room upstairs, indulging her domestic soul in the peace of a family reunion that seemed only possible to the Tylers on Sunday afternoon when they were gorged like a household of pythons. Wat retired to his bedroom. Every twenty minutes he wandered downstairs, passed the door of the sitting-room slowly, and returned up the back stairs by stealth. They heard him pacing the floor overhead. Millie listened to him thoughtfully. The younger sister, Ollie, was trying to write letters on note-paper of robin's-egg blue, and she blamed him for all the difficulties of composition; it was so distracting

to have him paddling around like that. Finally, when his mother heard him creaking down the stairs for the fourth time, she called out: "Wat! What *is* the matter with you? If you're restless, why don't you go for a walk?"

He answered hastily, "I'm going," and continued down to the lower hall. Millie waited to hear the front door shut behind him. She had just remembered what he said at breakfast about Jack Webb taking him to see the Janes girl. She went at once to the library to telephone.

And she came flying back with the news that while they had been away Wat had been spending almost every evening with Lizzie Janes; that he had been going to see her since their return; that Jack Webb thought they were engaged. "And the first thing *we* know," she said, "he'll be married to her."

Mr. Tyler tilted one eyebrow. He thought he understood that there were things that were not *in* Wat.

"Well, what's the matter with him, then?" Millie demanded. "Why has he been hiding it and sneaking off to see her and never saying a word about it, if he isn't ashamed of it and afraid to tell us? They've roped him in. That's what I think. Lizzie Janes is a regular old maid now. If she isn't engaged to Wat, she intends to be. No one else would ever marry her. I bet they've been working Wat for all they're worth. They're as *poor*——"

Her father continued incredulous.

"Well," she cried, "Jack Webb says Wat's been going to church with her twice a Sunday."

Watt's indolent aversion to church-going being well known, this was the most damning piece of evidence she could have produced against him.

Mrs. Tyler pleaded, "She can't be a *bad* girl if she goes to church twice a——"

"What difference does that make?" Millie demanded. "It doesn't make it any better for *us,* does it?"

"I'll speak to Wat," Mrs. Tyler promised feebly.

"It's no use speaking to Wat! *He* has nothing to do with it. Anyone can turn Wat around a little finger."

"Do you know her?" Mr. Tyler asked.

"I used to know her—before she went to—when she was at school here. She used to wear thick stockings and woolen mitts."

Ollie added, as a final word of condemnation, "Home-made!"

Mr. Tyler may have felt that he did not appreciate the merit of these facts. He made a judicial noise in his throat and said nothing.

"She's older than any of us—than Wat, too."

"Well," he said, reaching for his newspaper, "I suppose Wat'll do what he likes. He's not likely to do anything remarkable one way or the other."

"He's not going to marry Lizzie Janes," Millie declared. "Not if I can help it."

"Millie," her mother scolded, "you've no right interfering in Wat's affairs. He's older than you are——"

"It isn't only Wat's affair," she cried. "She isn't only going to marry Wat. We're thrown in with the bargain. I guess we have something to say."

"Tom!" Mrs. Tyler protested. "If you let her——"

"Well," he ruled, "Wat hasn't even taken the trouble to ask us what we thought about it. I don't feel called on to help him. It means more to the girls than it does to us, in any case. They'll have to put up with her for the rest of her life."

"I guess *not!*" Millie said confidently.

"Now, Millie!" her mother threatened. "If you——"

"If you want Lizzie Janes and her mother in this fam-

ily," Millie said, "I don't. I guess it won't be hard to let Wat and them know it, either. And if *you* won't," she ended defiantly, as she turned away, "I *will!*"

She went out, and Ollie followed. Mrs. Tyler dropped back in her chair, gazing speechlessly at her husband. He caught her eye as he turned a page of his paper. "All right now," he said. "Wait till Wat comes."

They waited. Millie did not. She distrusted her mother's partiality for Wat, and she distrusted her father's distaste for interfering in any household troubles. She trusted herself only, assured that if Wat's ridiculous misalliance was to be prevented it must be prevented by her; and she felt that it could be easily prevented, because it *was* ridiculous, because Wat was ridiculous, because Lizzie Janes was absurd. What was Wat's secrecy in the affair but a confession that he was ashamed of it? What was Lizzie Janes's sly silence but an evidence that she hoped to hook Wat before his family knew what was going on?

What indeed? She asked it of Ollie, and Ollie asked it of her. They had locked themselves in Millie's bedroom to consult together—Ollie sitting tailor-wise, cross-legged on the bed, and Millie gesticulating up and down the room—in one of those angry councils of war against their elders in which they were accustomed to face the cynical facts of life with a frankness that would have amazed mankind.

IV

And Wat, meanwhile, arrived at the door of the Janes house, because it was impossible for him *not* to arrive there. Alicia greeted him with her usual unchanging, gentle smile. He began to explain why he had not come that morning to take her to church; that his family——

"There's someone here," she said, unheeding. "Some-

one who wants to meet you. My brother!" And touching him lightly on the shoulder, she turned him toward the parlor and ushered him in to meet his future in the shape of Howard Janes.

Janes was then a tall, gaunt, feverish-eyed, dark enthusiast, of an extraordinary mental and physical restlessness —a man who should have been a visionary, but had become an electrical engineer. He had been working on the project to develop electrical power at Niagara Falls, and in ten minutes he was describing to Wat the whole theory and progress of the work, past, present, and future. "In ten years," he said, "Niagara power will be shot all through this district for a hundred miles around, and here's Coulton asleep, with one of the best power projects in Canada right under its nose. Where? Smith's Falls. And here *you* are, with a dead town, a dead street-car line, a lot of dead real estate, and the power to make the whole thing into a gold-mine running to waste over that hill. Why, man, if it was an oil-field, you'd be developing it like mad. Because it's electricity no one seems to see it. And in ten years it will be too late."

He talked to Wat as if Wat owned the car line, the real estate, the town itself, and when Wat glanced at Alicia she was *looking* at him as if he owned them. The power of that look was irresistible—hypnotic. He began to listen as if he owned the car lines and the real estate, to think as if he owned them, to ask questions, and finally to reply as if he owned them. Very grave, with his eyes narrowed, silent, he became a transportation magnate considering a development scheme proposed by an industrial promoter.

They were interrupted by the telephone in the hall. Alicia answered it. "It's for you," she said to Wat, looking at him significantly. "Your sister."

He went to the 'phone, puzzled. It was Millie's voice. "You're to come home at once," she said.

Wat asked, "What's the matter?"

"You know what's the matter," she snapped, "as well as I do. You're wanted home here at once." And while the meaning of that was slowly reaching him, through the preoccupied brain of the railroad magnate, she added, "I don't wonder you were ashamed to tell us!" and slapped up the receiver.

He stood for a moment at the 'phone, pale. And in that moment history was made. He went back to Alicia, face front, head up. She looked at him expectantly "They want me to bring you to see them," he said.

It was what she had expected, he supposed. Mark it as the beginning of his great career. What she expected! There's the point. That's the secret, as I see it, of the making of Sir Watson Tyler.

After a moment's hesitation she went to put on her hat. He said to her brother, "Can you wait till we get back? We'll be only a few minutes. I want to go into this thing with you in detail." And when he was on the street with her he explained, merely, "I want you to meet mother. I don't suppose we'll see dad. He's always so busy he doesn't pay much attention to what goes on at home."

"I don't think I've ever seen any of your family," she said, "except your sisters." She was thinking of them as she used to see them in their school-days, in short dresses, giggling, and chewing candy in the street-cars.

"They're very young," Wat warned her, "and they've been spoiled. You mustn't mind if Millie——She's been allowed to do pretty much as she likes. Our life at home isn't like yours, you know. I think our house is too big. We seem to be—sort of separated in our rooms."

Strange! He appeared apologetic. She did not un-

derstand why—unless it was that he was fearful of her criticism of his family. She knew that they were not socially distinguished, except by newspaper notice; but she thought she had no reverence for social position. And he could hardly be apologizing for their income.

V

The house, as they approached it, was pretentious, but that was probably the architect's fault. It was modestly withdrawn behind its trees, its flowerbeds, and its lawns. For a moment she saw herself, in her simple costume, coming to be passed upon by the eyes of alien wealth. Wat was silent, occupied with his own thoughts. He rang absent-mindedly.

A maid opened a door on a hall that was architecturally stuffy and not furnished in the rich simplicity that Alicia had expected. And the sight of the drawing-room was a shock. It was overcrowded with pink-upholstered shell-shaped furniture that gave her a note of overdressed bad taste. The carpet was as richly gaudy as a hand-painted satin pincushion. The bric-à-brac, of a florid costliness, cluttered the mantelpieces and the tabletops like a tradesman's display. The pictures on the walls were the family photographs and steel engravings of an earlier home. It was a room of undigested dividends, and she thought that she began to see why Wat had been apologetic. To his credit he seemed uncomfortable in it. "I'll just tell them you're here," he said.

He left her there and went out to the stairs. Millie was coming down to see who had rung. "Well," she cried from a landing above him as he ascended resolutely, "will you tell us what you think you're doing with that Lizzie Janes?"

He caught her by the arm. He said in a voice that was

new to her: "I've brought her to call on mother. Tell her she's here."

"You've brought her to——! I'll do nothing of the kind. You can just take her away again. I don't want her, and *they* don't want her." She had begun to raise her voice, with the evident intention of letting anyone hear who would. "If she thinks she can——"

"That's enough!" He stopped her angrily, with his hand over her mouth. "You ought to be——"

She struggled with him, striking his hand away. "How *dare* you! If you think that Lizzie Janes——"

He was afraid that Alicia might hear it. He grabbed her up roughly and began to carry her upstairs, fighting with him, furious at the indignity—for he had caught her where he could, with no respect for her body or her clothes. No one, in years, no matter what she did, had dared to lay hands on her; the sanctity of her fastidious young person was an inviolable right to her; and Wat's assault upon it was brutal to her, degrading, atrocious. She became hysterical, in a clawed and tousled passion of shame and resentment. He carried her to her room, tossed her onto her bed, and left her, face down on her pillows, sobbing, outraged. She could have killed him —or herself.

He straightened his necktie and strode into the sitting-room.

"Why, Wat!" his mother cried. "What's the matter?"

"Miss Janes," he said, "is downstairs. I've brought her to call on you."

She rose, staring. His father looked at him, surprised, over the top of his paper. "Well," he demanded, "what's all this about Miss Janes, anyway?"

Wat gave him back his look defiantly. "She's the

finest girl I ever met. And I'm going to marry her if I can."

"Oh," Mr. Tyler said, and returned to his news.

Ollie rushed out to find her sister.

Wat turned his amazing countenance on his mother.

"Yes, Wat," she replied to it—and went with him obediently.

VI

Of the interview that followed in the drawing-room there were several conflicting reports made. Ollie slipped down to hear the end of it—after a stupefying account from Millie of what had happened—but her report to Millie is negligible. From that night both the girls ceased to exist as factors in Wat's life; he saw them and heard them thereafter only absentmindedly.

Mrs. Tyler's report was made in voluble excitement to her husband, who listened, frowning, over his cigar. "And, Tom, you wouldn't have known him," she said. "He wasn't like—like himself at all! It was so pretty! They're so in love with each other. She's such a sweet girl."

"Well," he grumbled, "I'll have nothing to do with it. It's in your department. If it was one of the girls it'd be different. I suppose Wat'll have to do his own marrying. He's old enough. I hope she'll make a man of him."

"'A man of him'! She! Why, she's as—— No, indeed! You ought to see the way *she* defers to *him.* She's as proud of him! And he's as *different!*"

He was unconvinced. "I'm glad to hear it. You'd better go and look after Millie. She accuses him of assault and battery."

"It serves her right. I'll not go near her. And,

Tom," she said, "he wants to talk to you about a plan he has for the railway—for using electric light to run it, or something like that."

"Huh! Who put that in his head?"

"Oh, he made it up himself. Her brother's an engineer, and they've been talking about it."

"I suppose!" he said. "She'll be working the whole Janes family in on us." He snorted. "I'm glad someone's put something into his head besides eating and sleeping."

"Now, Tom," she pleaded, "you've got to be fair to Wat."

"All right, Mary," he relented. "Run along and see Millie. I've had enough for *one* Sunday."

As for Alicia Janes, it was late at night when *she* made her report to her mother in a subdued tremble of excitement. She had overheard something of Wat's scuffle with Millie on the stairs, but she did not speak of it except to say: "I'm afraid the girls are awful. The youngest, Ollie, is overdressed and silly—with the manners of a spoiled child of ten. It's her mother's fault. She's one of those helpless big women. Wat must have got his qualities from his father."

"Did you find out why they hadn't called?"

"No-o. But I can guess."

"Yes?"

"Well, it isn't a nice thing to say, but I really think Wat's—rather as if he were ashamed of them. And I don't wonder, mother! Their front room's furnished with that—— Oh, and such bric-à-brac!" She paused. She hesitated. She blushed. "Wat asked me if I'd —— You know he had never really *spoken* before, although I knew he——"

Her mother said softly, "Yes?"

She looked down at the worn carpet. "And I really

felt so sorry for him. The family's awful, I know, but he's so—— I said I would."

VII

She had said she would. And Wat, long after midnight, lying on his back in bed, staring up at the darkness, felt as if he were afloat on a current that was carrying him away from his old life with more than the power of Niagara. His mind was full of Howard Janes's plans for harnessing Smith's Falls, of electrifying the street railway, of lighting Coulton with electricity and turning the vacant Tyler lots of the northern suburb into factory sites. He was thinking of incorporations, franchises, capitalizations, stocks, bonds, mortgages, loans. He had been talking them over for hours with Janes on the veranda, at the supper-table, on the street. There had been no music. As Wat was leaving he had spoken to Alicia hastily in the hall—asking her to marry him, in fact—and she had said, "Oh, Wat!" clinging to his hands as he kissed her. He could still feel that tremulous, confiding grasp of her strong fingers as she surrendered her life to him, depending on him, proud of him, humble to him. He shivered. He was afraid.

And that was to be only the first of many such frightened midnights. A thousand times he was to ask himself: "What am I doing? Why have I gone into this business? It'll kill me. It'll worry me to death." He had gone into it because Alicia had expected him to; but he did not know it. The maddest thing he ever did——

It was when the power scheme had been successfully floated, the street railway was putting out long radial lines along the country roads, and the gas company was willing to sell out to him in order to escape the inevitable crash of competition with his electric light. The banks

suddenly began to make trouble about carrying him. He was in their debt for an appalling amount. He felt that he ought to prepare his wife for the worst. "Well, Wat," she said reproachfully, when she understood him, "if the banks are going to bother you, I don't see why you don't get a bank of your own."

It was as if she thought he could buy a bank in a toy-shop. She expected it of him. Miracles! Nothing but miracles! And it was the maddest thing he ever did, but he went after the moribund Farmers' Trust Company, got it with his father's assistance, reorganized it and put it on its feet, while he held up the weak-kneed power projects and Janes talked manufacturers into buying power sites. The Mechanics' Bank of Canada passed to him later, but by that time he was running at "Tylertown" an automobile factory, a stone-crusher, a carborundum works, and the plant of Coulton's famous Eleco Breakfast Food, cooked by electricity, and the success of the whole city of Coulton was so involved with his fortunes that he simply could not be allowed to fail.

And here was the fact that made the whole thing possible: Janes had the vision and the daring necessary to attempt their undertakings, but he could not have carried them out; whereas Wat would never have gone beyond the original power-house; but with Janes talking to him and Alicia looking at him he moved ahead with a stolid, conservative caution and a painstaking care of detail that made every move as safe and deliberate as a glacial advance. He worked day and night, methodically, with a ceaseless application that would have worn out a less solid and lethargic man. It was as if, having eaten and slept—and nothing else—for twenty years, he could do as he pleased about food now, and never rest at all. He was wonderful. His mind digested everything, like his stomach, slowly, but without distress. His

shyness, now deeply concealed, made him silent, unfathomable. He had no friends, because he confided in no one; he was too diffident to do it. Behind his inscrutable silence he studied and watched the men with whom he had to work, moving like a quiet engineer among the machinery which he had started, and the uproar of it. And the moment he decided that a man was wrong he took him out and dropped him clean, without feeling, without any friendly entanglement to deter him, silently.

He had to go into politics to protect his franchises, and he became the "Big Business Interests" behind the local campaign; but he never made a public appearance; he managed campaign funds, sat on executive committees, was consulted by the party leaders, and passed upon policies and candidates. *The Coulton Advertiser* annoyed him, and he bought it. His wife had gathered around her a number of music-lovers, and they formed a stringed orchestra that studied and played in the music-room of Wat's new home on the hill above "Tylertown." She expected him to be present, and he rarely failed. As a matter of fact, he seldom heard more than the first few bars of a composition, then, emotionalized, his brain excited, he sat planning, reviewing, advancing, and reconsidering his work. Music had that effect on him. It enlivened his lumbering mind. He became as addicted to it as if it were alcohol.

He followed his wife's plan for the formation of a symphony orchestra, which he endowed. When there was no proper building for it he put up Mozart Hall and gave it to the city. She wanted to hear Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, so the orchestra had to be supplemented with a choir. He endowed the Coulton Conservatory of Music when she objected that she could not get voices or musicians because there was no way in Coulton to educate or train them. And in doing these things he gave

Coulton its fame as a musical center. (Lamplight on the veranda, and Mrs. Janes playing the piano behind the open French windows!)

It was the campaign against reciprocity that put him in the Senate. He believed that reciprocity with the United States would ruin his factories. He headed the committee of Canadian manufacturers against the measure. The consequent defeat of the Liberal party put his friends in power. They rewarded him with a Senatorship. He was opposed to taking it, but his wife expected him to. He went into the Cabinet as Minister without portfolio, a year later. It was inevitable. He was the financial head of the party; they had to have him at their government councils. When the war with Germany broke out he gave full pay to all of his employees that volunteered. He endowed a battery of machine-guns from Coulton. Every factory that he controlled he turned into munitions-works. He contributed lavishly to the Red Cross. And, of course, he was knighted.

It is an open secret that he will probably be made Lord Coulton when the readjustment of the colonial affairs of the Empire takes him to London. He will be influential there; he has the silent, conservative air of ponderous authority that England trusts. And Lady Tyler is a poised, gracious, and charming person who will be popular socially. She, of course, is of no importance to the Empire. She still looks at Wat worshipfully, without any suspicion that it was she who made him—not the slightest.

I do not know how much of the old Wat is left in him. His silence covers him. It is impossible to tell how greatly the quality and texture of his mind may have changed under the exercise and labor of his gigantic undertakings. I saw him when he was in New York to

hear the Coulton orchestra and choir give the Ninth Symphony, to the applause of the most critical. ("The scion of a noble house," one of the papers called him.) And it certainly seemed impossible—although I swear I believe it is true—that the solid magnificences of the man and his achievements were all due to the fact that when he came back from the Janes telephone to confront the expectancy of Alicia Janes, on that Sunday night in 1892, he said, "They want me to bring you to see them," instead of saying, "They want me at home."

THE CONNOISSEUR[1]

Perceval Gibbon

The office of the machine-tool agency, where Mr. Baruch sat bowed and intent over his desk, was still as a chapel upon that afternoon of early autumn; the pale South Russian sun, shining full upon its windows, did no more than touch with color the sober shadows of the place. From the single room of the American Vice-consulate, across the narrow staircase-landing without, there came to Mr. Baruch the hum of indistinguishable voices that touched his consciousness without troubling it. Then suddenly, with a swell-organ effect, as though a door had been flung open between him and the speakers, he heard a single voice that babbled and faltered in noisy, shrill anger.

"Out o' this—out o' this!" It was the unmistakable voice of Selby, the Vice-consul, whose routine day was incomplete without a quarrel. "Call yourself an American—you! Comin' in here——"

The voice ceased abruptly. Mr. Baruch at his desk moved slightly like one who disposes of a trivial interruption and bent again to the matter before him. Between his large white hands, each decorated with a single ring, he held a small oblong box, the size of a cigar-case, of that blue lacquer of which Russian craftsmen once alone possessed the secret. Battered now by base uses, tarnished and abraded here and there, it preserved yet, for

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such eyes as Mr. Baruch's, clues to its ancient-like delicacy of surface and the glory of its sky-rivalling blue. He had found it an hour before upon a tobacconist's counter, containing matches, and had bought it for a few kopecks; and now alone in his office, amid his catalogues of lathes and punches, he was poring over it, reading it as another man might read poetry, inhaling from it all that the artist, its maker, had breathed into it.

There was a telephone at work in the Vice-consulate now—a voice speaking in staccato bursts, pausing between each for the answer. Mr. Baruch sighed gently, lifting the box for the light to slide on its surface. He was a large man, nearing his fiftieth year, and a quiet self-security, a quality of being at home in the world, was the chief of his effects Upon the wide spaces of his face the little and neat features were grouped concisely—a nose boldly curved, but small and well-modeled, a mouth at once sensuous and fastidious, and eyes steadfast and benign. A dozen races between the Caspian and the Vistula had fused to produce this machine-tool agent; and over the union of them there was spread, like a preservative varnish, the smoothness of an imperturbable placidity.

Footsteps crossed the landing and there was a loud knock on his door. Before Mr. Baruch, deliberate always, could reply, it was pushed open, and Selby, the Vice-consul, his hair awry, his glasses askew on the high, thin bridge of his nose, and with all his general air of a maddened bird, stood upon the threshold.

"Ah, Selby; it is you, my friend!" remarked Mr. Baruch pleasantly. "And you wish to see me—yes?"

Selby advanced into the room, saving his glasses by a sudden clutch.

"Say, Baruch," he shrilled, "here's a hell of a thing! This place gets worse every day. Feller comes into

my office—kind of a peddler, selling rugs and carpets, and shows a sort of passport. Armenian, I guess, or a Persian or something; and when I tell him to clear out, damned if he doesn't go and throw a kind of a fit right on my floor."

"Ah!" said Mr. Baruch sympathetically. "A fit—yes? You have telephoned for the *Gorodski Pomosh*—the town ambulance?"

"Yes," said Selby—"at least, I had Miss Pilgrim do that—my clerk, you know."

"Yes," said Mr. Baruch, "I know Miss Pilgrim. Well, I will come and see your peddler-man." He rose. "But first—see what I have been buying for myself, Selby."

He held out the little battered box upon his large firm palm. "You like it? I gave forty kopecks for it to a man who would have taken twenty. It is nice—yes?"

Selby gazed at it vaguely. "Very nice," he said perfunctorily. "I used to buy 'em too when I came here first."

Mr. Baruch smiled that quiet, friendly smile of his and put the box carefully into a drawer of his desk.

The American Vice-consulate at Nikolaieff was housed in a single great room lighted by a large window at one end, overlooking the port and the wharves; so that, entering from the gloom of the little landing one looked along the length of it as toward the mouth of a cave. Desks, tables, a copying press, and a typewriter were all its gear; it was a place as aridly specialized for its purpose as an iron-foundry; but now, for the moment, it was redeemed from its everyday barrenness by the two figures upon the floor near the entrance.

The peddler lay at full length, a bundle of strange travel-wrecked clothes, suggesting a lay-figure in his limp alertness and the loose sprawls of his limbs. Beside

him on the boards, trim in white shirt-waist and tweed skirt, kneeled the Vice-consul's clerk, Miss Pilgrim; she had one arm under the man's head and with the other was drawing toward her his fallen bundle of rugs to serve as a pillow. As she bent, her gentle face, luminously fair, was over the swart clenched countenance of the unconscious man, whose stagnant eyes seemed set on her in an unwinking stare.

Mr. Baruch bent to help her place the bundle in position. She lifted her face to him in recognition. Selby, fretting to and fro, snorted.

"Damned if I'd have touched him," he said. "Most likely he never saw soap in his life. A hobo, that's what he is—just a hobo."

Miss Pilgrim gave a deprecating smile and stood up. She was a slight girl, serious and gentle, and half her waking life was spent in counteracting the effects of Selby's indigestion and ill-temper. Mr. Baruch was still stooping to the bundle of rugs.

"Oh, that'll be all right, Mr. Baruch," she assured him. "He's quite comfortable now."

Mr. Baruch, still stooping, looked up at her.

"I am seeing the kind of rugs he has," he answered. "I am interested in rugs. You do not know rugs—no?"

"No," replied Miss Pilgrim.

"Ah! This, now, is out of Persia, I think," said Mr. Baruch, edging one loose from the disordered bundle. "Think!" he said. "This poor fellow, lying here—he is Armenian. How many years has he walked, carrying his carpets and rugs, all the way down into Persia, selling and changing his goods in bazaars and caravanserais, and then back over the Caucasus and through the middle of the Don Cossacks—all across the Black Lands—carrying the rugs till he comes to throw his fit on Mr. Selby's floor! It is a strange way to live, Miss Pilgrim—yes?"

"Ye-es," breathed Miss Pilgrim, "ye-es."

He smiled at her. He had a corner of the rug unfolded now and draped over his bent knee. His hand stroked it delicately; the blank light from the window let its coloring show in its just values. Mr. Baruch, with the dregs of his smile yet curving his lips, scanned it without too much appearance of interest. He was known as a "collector," a man who gathered things that others disregarded, and both Miss Pilgrim and Selby watched him with the respect of the laity for the initiate. But they could not discern nor share the mounting ecstasy of the connoisseur, of the spirit which is to the artist what the wife is to the husband, as he realized the truth and power of the coloring, its stained-glass glow, the justice and strength of the patterning, and the authentic silk-and-steel of the texture.

"Is it any good?" asked Selby suddenly. "I've heard of them being worth a lot sometimes, thousands of dollars!"

"Sometimes," agreed Mr. Baruch. "Those you can see in museums. This one, now, I would offer him twenty roubles for it, and I would give perhaps thirty if he bargained too hard. That is because I have a place for it in my house."

"And he'd probably make a hundred per cent. on it at that," said Selby. "These fellows——"

The loud feet of the ambulance men on the stairs interrupted him. Mr. Baruch, dragging the partly unfolded rug with him, moved away as the white-clad doctor and his retinue of stretcher-bearers came in at the door, with exactly the manner of the mere spectator who makes room for people more directly concerned. He saw the doctor kneel beside the prostrate man and Miss Pilgrim hand him one of the office tea-glasses; then, while all crowded round to watch the process of luring back the strayed soul

of the peddler, he had leisure to assure himself again of the quality of his find. The tea-glass clinked against clenched teeth. "A spoon, somebody!" snapped the doctor; the cramped throat gurgled painfully; but Mr. Baruch, slave to the delight of the eye, was unheeding. A joy akin to love, that pervaded and rejoiced his every faculty, had possession of him. The carpet was all he had dreamed it —and more, the perfect expression on its medium of a fine and pure will to beauty.

The peddler on the floor behind him groaned painfully and tatters of speech formed on his lips. "That's better," said the doctor encouragingly. Mr. Baruch dropped the rug and moved quietly toward the group.

The man was conscious again; a stretcher-bearer, kneeling behind him, was holding him in a half-sitting posture; and Mr. Baruch watched with interest how the tide of returning intelligence mounted in the thin mask of his face. He was an Armenian by every evidence—an effect of weather-beaten pallor appearing through dense masses of coal-black beard and hair; one of those timid and servile offscourings of civilization whose wandering lives are daily epics of horrid peril and adventure. His pale eyes roved here and there as he lay against the stretcher-bearer's knee.

"Well," said the doctor, rising and dusting his hands one against the other, "we won't need the stretcher. Two of you take him under the arms and help him up."

The burly Russian ambulance-men hoisted him easily enough and stood supporting him, while he hung between them weakly. Still his eyes wandered, seeking dumbly in the big room. The doctor turned to speak to the Vice-consul and Miss Pilgrim moved forward to the sick man.

"Yes?" she questioned in her uncertain Russian. "Yes? What is it?"

He made feeble sounds, but Mr. Baruch heard no shaped word. Miss Pilgrim, however, seemed to understand.

"Oh, your rugs!" she answered. "They're all here, quite safe." She pointed to the bundle, lying where it had been thrust aside. "Quite safe, you see!"

Mr. Baruch said no word. The silken carpet that he had removed was out of sight upon the farther side of the big central table of the office. The peddler groaned again and murmured. Miss Pilgrim bent forward to give ear. Mr. Baruch, quietly and deliberately, as always, moved to join the conference of the doctor and Selby. He was making a third to their conversation when Miss Pilgrim turned.

"One more?" she was saying. "Is there one more? Mr. Baruch, did you—— Oh, there it is!"

She moved across to fetch it, the peddler's eyes following her slavishly. Mr. Baruch smiled.

"Yes?" he said. "Oh, that carpet! He wants to sell it—yes?"

"He isn't fit to do any bargaining yet," replied Miss Pilgrim; and Mr. Baruch nodded agreeably.

The doctor and Selby finished their talk, and the former came back into the grouping. "Well, take him down to the ambulance," he bade the men. They moved to obey; but the sick man, mouthing strange sounds, seemed to try to hang back, making gestures with his head toward the disregarded bundle that was the whole of his earthly wealth.

"What's the matter with him?" cried the doctor impatiently. "Those rugs? Oh, we can't take a hotbed of microbes like that to the hospital! Move him along, there!"

"And I'm not going to have 'em here," barked Selby.

The peddler, limp between the big stretcher-bearers, moaned and seemed to shiver in a vain effort to free himself.

"Wait, please!" Miss Pilgrim came forward. She had been folding the silken rug of Mr. Baruch's choice and was now carrying it before her; it was as though she wore an apron of dawn-gold and sunset-red. The pitiful man rolled meek, imploring eyes upon her. She cast down the rug she carried upon the others in their bundle and stood over them.

"I will take care of them," she said. "They will be safe with me. Do you understand me? Me!" She touched herself upon her white-clad bosom with one hand, pointing with the other to the rugs.

The man gazed at her mournfully, resignedly. Martyrdom was the daily bread of his race; oppression had been his apprenticeship to life. It was in the order of things as he knew it that those who had power over him should plunder him; but facing the earnest girl, with her frank and kindly eyes, some glimmer of hope lit in his abjectness. He sighed and let his head fall forward in a feeble motion of acquiescence; and the big men who held him took him out and down the stairs to the waiting ambulance.

"Well!" said Selby, as the door closed behind the doctor. "Who wouldn't sell a farm and be a consul? We ought to have the place disinfected. What do you reckon to do with that junk, Miss Pilgrim?"

Miss Pilgrim was readjusting the thong that had bound the rugs together. "Oh, I'll take them home in a droshky, Mr. Selby," she said. "I've got a cupboard in my rooms where they can stay till the poor man gets out of hospital."

"All right," snarled Selby. "It's your trouble." He

turned away, but stopped upon a sudden thought. "What about letting Baruch take that rug now?" he asked. "He's offered a price, an' he can pay it to you."

"Certainly," agreed Mr. Baruch. "I can pay the cash to Miss Pilgrim and she can pay it to the poor man. He will perhaps be glad to have some cash at once when he comes out."

Miss Pilgrim, kneeling beside the pack of rugs, looked doubtfully from one to the other. Mr. Baruch returned her gaze benignly; Selby, as always, had the affronted air of one who is prepared to be refused the most just and moderate demand. "Why," she began hesitatingly, "I suppose——"

Then Selby had to strike in. "Aren't worrying because you said you'd look after the stuff yourself, are you?" he jeered.

Mr. Baruch's expression did not alter by so much as a twitch; there was no outward index of his impulse to smite the blundering man across the mouth.

The hesitancy upon Miss Pilgrim's face dissolved in an instant and she positively brightened.

"Of course," she said happily, "what can I have been thinking of? When the poor man comes out, Mr. Baruch can make his own bargain with him; but till then —I promised!"

Selby, with slipping glasses awry on his nose, gaped at her. "Promised!" he repeated. "That—that hobo——"

Mr. Baruch intervened. "But, Selby, my friend, Miss Pilgrim is quite right. She promised, and it is only two or three days to wait, and also it is not the only rug in the world. Though," he added generously, "it is a nice rug—yes?"

Miss Pilgrim smiled at him gratefully; Selby shrugged and just caught his glasses as the shrug shook them loose.

"Fix it to suit yourselves," he snarled, and moved away toward his untidy desk by the window.

The pale autumn sun had dissolved in watery splendors as Mr. Baruch, with the wide astrachan collar of his overcoat turned up about his ears, walked easily homeward in the brisk evening chill. There were lights along the wharves, and the broad waters of the port, along which his road lay, were freckled with the spark-like lanterns on the ships, each with its little shimmer of radiance reflected from the stream. Commonly, as he strolled, he saw it all with gladness—the world and the fullness thereof were ministers of his pleasure; but upon this night he saw it absently, with eyes that dwelt beyond it all. Outwardly he was the usual Mr. Baruch; his slightly sluggish benevolence of demeanor was unchanged as he returned the salute of a policeman upon a corner; but inwardly he was like a man uplifted by good news. The sense of pure beauty, buried in his being, stirred like a rebellious slave; those arabesques, that coloring, that texture, thrilled him like a gospel.

It was in the same mood of abstraction that he let himself into his flat in the great German-built apartment house that overlooked the boulevard and the thronged river. He laid aside his overcoat in the little hall, conventional with its waxed wood and its mirror, clicked an electric-light switch, and passed through a portière into the salon, which was the chief room of his abode—a large room, oblong and high-ceilinged, designed by a man with palace architecture—that obsession of the Russian architect—on the brain. He advanced into it, still with that vagueness of sense, and stopped, looking around him.

It was part of the effect which Mr. Baruch made upon those who came into contact with him that few suspected him of a home, a domesticity of his own; he was so complete, so compactly self-contained, without appanages of

that kind. Here, however, was the frame of his real existence, which contained it as a frame contains a picture and threw it into relief. The great room, under the strong lights, showed the conventional desert of polished parquet floor, with sparse furniture grouped about it. There was an ivory-inlaid stand with a Benares brass tray; a Circassian bridal linen-chest stood against a wall; the tiles of the stove in the corner illustrated the life and martyrdom of Saint Tychon. Upon another wall was a trophy of old Cossack swords. Before the linen-chest there stood a trunk of the kind that every Russian housemaid takes with her to her employment—a thing of bent birchwood, fantastically painted in strong reds and blues. One buys such things for the price of a cocktail.

Mr. Baruch stood looking round him at the room. Everything in it was of his choosing, the trophy of some moment or some hour of delight. He had selected his own background.

"Ah—Samuel!"

He turned, deliberate always. Between the portières that screened the opposite doorway there stood the supreme "find" of his collection. Somewhere or other, between the processes of becoming an emperor in the machine-tool trade of Southern Russia and an American citizen, Mr. Baruch—so complete in himself, so perfect an entity—had added to himself a wife. The taste that manifested itself alike on battered blue lacquer and worn prayer-rugs from Persia had not failed him then; he had found a thing perfect of its kind. From the uneasy Caucasus, where the harem-furnishers of Circassia jostle the woman merchants of Georgia, he had brought back a prize. The woman who stood in the doorway—one strong bare arm uplifted to hold back the stamped leather curtain—was large, a great white creature like a moving statue, with a still, blank face framed in banks of shining jet hair. The strong lights of the chamber shone on her;

she stood, still as an image, with large incurious eyes looking at him. All the Orient was immanent in her; she had the quiet, the resignation, the un-hope of the odalisque.

"Samuel," she said again.

"Ah, Adina!" And then, in the Circassian idiom, "Grace go before you!"

Her white arm sank and the curtains swelled together, behind her. Mr. Baruch took the chief of his treasures into his arms and kissed her.

The room in which presently they dined was tiny like a *cabinet particulier,* they sat at food like lovers, with shutters closed upon the windows, to defend their privacy. Mr. Baruch ate largely, and his great wife watched him across the table with still satisfaction. The linen of the table had been woven by the nuns of the Lavra at Kieff; the soup bowls were from Cracow; there was nothing in the place that had not its quality and distinction. And Mr. Baruch fitted it as a sail fits its shell. It *was* his shell; for, like a snail, he had exuded it from his being and it was part of him.

"I saw a carpet to-day," he said abruptly. There was Black Sea salmon on his plate and he spoke above a laden fork.

"Yes?" The big, quiet woman did not so much inquire as invite him to continue.

Mr. Baruch ate some salmon. "A carpet—yes!" he said presently. "Real—like diamonds—like you, Adina! No mistake!"

At the compliment, she lowered her head and raised it again, in a motion like a very slow nod. Mr. Baruch finished his salmon without further words.

"And——?" Upon her unfinished question he looked up.

"Yes," he said, "surely! in a few days I shall bring it home."

Her large eyes, the docile eyes of the slave-wife, ac-

claimed him. For her, there were no doubts, no judgments; the husband was the master, the god of the house. Mr. Baruch continued his meal to its end.

"And now," he said presently, when he had finished, "you will go to bed."

She stood up forthwith, revealing again her majestic stature and pose. Mr. Baruch sat at his end of the table with his tiny cup of coffee and his thimble-like glass before him. He lifted his eyes and gazed at her appreciatively, and for a moment there lit in his face, as it were, a reflection of what Selby and Miss Pilgrim might have seen in it, had they known how to look, when first he realized the silken glories of the carpet. The woman, returning his gaze, maintained her pale, submissive calm.

"Blessings upon you," he said, dismissing her.

She lowered her splendid head in instant obedience.

"Blessings," she replied, "and again blessings! Have sweet sleep, lord and husband!"

He sat above his coffee and his liqueur and watched her superb body pass forth from the little room. She did not turn to look back; they are not trained to coquetry, those chattel-women of the Caucasus. Mr. Baruch smiled while he let the sweetish and violently strong liqueur roll over his tongue and the assertively fragrant coffee possess his senses. His wife was a "find," a thing perfect of its sort, that satisfied his exigent taste; and now again he was to thrill with the joy of acquisition. There were rugs in the room where he sat—one draped over a settee, another hanging upon the wall opposite him, one underfoot—each fine and singular in its manner. He passed an eye over them and then ceased to see them. His benevolent face with all its suggestive reserve and its quiet shrewdness fell vague with reverie; it was in absence of mind rather than in presence of appetite that he helped himself for the fourth time to the high-explosive

liqueur from the old Vilna decanter; and there flushed into sight before him, the clearer for the spur with which the potent drink rowelled his consciousness, the vision of the silk carpet, its glow, as though fire were mixed with the dyes of it, the faultless rightness and art of its pattern, the soul-ensnaring perfection of the whole.

It was some hours later that he looked into his wife's room on his way to his own. She was asleep, her quiet head cushioned upon the waves of her hair. Mr. Baruch, half-burned cigar between his teeth, stood and gazed at her. Her face, wiped clean of its powder, was white as paper, with that death-like whiteness which counts as beauty in Circassia; only the shadows of her eyelids and the broad red of her lips stained her pallor. Across her breast the red-and-blue hem of the quilt lay like a scarf.

Mr. Baruch looked at the arrangement critically. He was a connoisseur in perfection and something was lacking. It eluded him for a moment or two and, then suddenly, like an inspiration, he perceived it. The rug—the thing delicate as silk, with its sheen, its flush of lines, with the white, slumbering face above it! The picture, the perfect thing—he saw it!

The woman in bed stirred and murmured.

"Blessings upon you," said Mr. Baruch, and smiled as he turned away.

"Bl-essings," she murmured sleepily, without opening her eyes, and sighed and lay still once more.

The heart of a man is a battle-ground, where might is always right and victory is always to the strongest of the warring passions. And even a saint's passion to holiness is scarcely stronger, more selfless, more disregardful of conditions and obstacles than the passion of the lover of the beautiful, the connoisseur, toward acquisition. In the days that followed Mr. Baruch, walking his quiet ways about the city, working in the stillness of his office, ac-

quired the sense that the carpet, by the mere force of his desire, was somehow due to him—a thing only momentarily out of his hands, like one's brief loan to a friend. Presently it would come his way and be his; and it belonged to his sense of security in his right that not once, not even when he remembered it most avidly, did he think of the expedient of buying it from the sick peddler by paying him the value of it. Another man would probably have gone forthwith to Selby, told him the secret, and enlisted his aid; but Mr. Baruch did not work like that. He allowed chance a week in which to show its reasonableness; and not till then, nothing having happened, did he furnish himself one afternoon with an excuse, in the form of a disputed customs charge, and cross the narrow landing to the American Vice-consulate.

Selby was there alone at his disorderly desk by the window, fussing feebly among the chaos of his tumbled papers and making a noise of desperation with his lips like a singing kettle.

"Ah, Selby, my friend!" Mr. Baruch went smilingly forward. "You work always too much. And now come I with a little other thing for you. It is too bad—yes?"

"Hullo, Baruch," returned Selby. "You're right about the workin'. Here I keep a girl to keep my papers in some kind of a sort of order, an' I been huntin' and diggin' for an hour to find one of 'em. It gets me what she thinks I pay her for! Hoboes an' that kind of trash—that's her style."

Mr. Baruch had still his agreeable, mild smile which was as much a part of his daily wear as his trousers. He could not have steered the talk to better purpose.

"Hoboes?" he said vaguely. "Trash!"

Selby exploded in weak, sputtering fury, and as always his glasses canted on the high, thin bridge of his nose and waggled in time to each jerk of words.

"It's that dam' hobo—you saw him, Baruch!—that pranced in here and threw a fit and a lot of old carpets all over my floor. Armenian or some such kind of a nigger! Well, they took him to the hospital; an' this afternoon he hadn't got more sense than to send a message over here."

Mr. Baruch nodded. "Ah, to Miss Pilgrim—yes?—because of her very kind treatment."

Selby caught his glasses as they fell. "Huh!" he sneered malevolently. "You'd have to be a hobo before you'd get kindness from her. Hard-luck stories is the only kind she believes. 'I'll have to go, Mr. Selby,' she says. And she goes—and here's me huntin' and pawin' around——"

"Yes," agreed Mr. Baruch, "it is inconvenient. So I will come back to-morrow with my matter, when you shall have more time. Then the poor man, he is worse—or better?"

"You don't suppose I been inquirin' after him, do you?" squealed Selby.

"No," replied Mr. Baruch equably, "I do not suppose that, Selby, my friend."

The street in which Miss Pilgrim had her rooms was one of the long gullies of high-fronted architecture running at right angles to the river, and thither—portly, handsomely overcoated, with the deliberateness of a balanced and ordered mind in every tread of his measured gait—went Mr. Baruch. He had no plan; his resource and personality would not fail him in an emergency; and it was time he brought them to bear. One thing he was sure of—he would take the carpet home that night.

At the head of two flights of iron-railed stone stairs he reached the door of the flat which he sought. Two or three attempts upon the bell-push brought no response, and he could hear no sound of life through the door. He

waited composedly; it did not enter his head that all the occupants might be out; and he was right, for presently, after he had thumped on the door with his gloved fist, there was a slip-slap of feet within and a sloven of a woman opened to him.

Mr. Baruch gave her his smile. "The English lady is in? I wish to speak to her."

The woman stood aside hastily to let him enter. "Say Gaspodin Baruch is here," he directed blandly.

It was a narrow corridor, flanked with doors, in which he stood. The woman knocked at the nearest of these, opened it, and spoke his name. Immediately from within he heard the glad, gentle voice of the Consul's clerk.

"Surely!" it answered the servant in Russian; then called in English: "Come in, Mr. Baruch, please!"

He removed his hat and entered. An unshaded electric light bulb filled the room with crude light, stripping its poverty and tawdriness naked to the eye—its bamboo furniture, its imitation parquet, and the cheap distemper of its walls. But of these Mr. Baruch was only faintly aware, for in the middle of the floor, with brown paper and string beside her, Miss Pilgrim knelt amid a kaleidoscope of tumbled rugs, and in her hands, half folded already, was *the* rug.

She was smiling up at him with her mild, serene face, while under her thin, pale hands lay the treasure.

"Now this is nice of you, Mr. Baruch," she was saying. "I suppose Mr. Selby told you I'd had to go out."

Mr. Baruch nodded. He had let his eyes rest on the rug for a space of seconds and then averted them.

"Yes," he said. "He said it was some message about the poor man who was ill, and I think he was angry."

"Angry?" Miss Pilgrim's smile faded. "I'm—I'm sorry for that."

"So," continued Mr. Baruch, "as I have to go by this way, I think I will call to see if I can help. It was some paper Mr. Selby cannot find, I think."

"Some paper?" Miss Pilgrim pondered. "You don't know which it was?" Mr. Baruch shook his head regretfully. Between them, the rug lay and glowed up at him.

"You see," continued Miss Pilgrim, "it's this way, Mr. Baruch. That poor man in the hospital doesn't seem to be getting any better yet, and he's evidently fretting about his rugs. They're probably all he's got in the world. So this afternoon they telephoned up from the hospital to say he wanted me to send one down in particular—the thinnest one of them all. That's this one!"

She showed it to him, her fingers feeling its edge. There was wonder in his mind that the mere contact of it did not tell her of its worth.

"I'm afraid it's the one you wanted to buy," she said—"the one you said was worth thirty roubles. Well, of course, it's his, and since he wanted it I had to get it for him. I couldn't do anything else, could I, Mr. Baruch?"

Mr. Baruch agreed. "It is a very kind treatment," he approved. "So now you pack it in a parcel and take it to the hospital before you go back to find Mr. Selby's paper—yes? Mr. Selby will be glad."

A pucker of worry appeared between the girl's frank brows, and she fell swiftly to folding and packing the rug.

"If—if only he hasn't left the office before I get there!" she doubted.

Mr. Baruch picked up the string and prepared to assist with the packing.

"Perhaps he will not be gone," he said consolingly. "He was so angry, I think the paper would be important, and he would stay to find it—yes?" Miss Pilgrim did

not seem cheered by this supposition. "Well," said Mr. Baruch, then, "if it should be a help to you and the poor man, I can take this parcel for you and leave it in the gate of the hospital when I go past this evening."

He had a momentary tremor as he made the proposal, but it was not doubt that it would be accepted nor fear lest his purpose should show through it. He felt neither of these; it was the thrill of victory that he had to keep out of his tone and his smile.

For it was victory. Miss Pilgrim beamed at him thankfully.

"Oh, Mr. Baruch, you *are* kind!" she cried. "I didn't like to ask you, but you must be a thought-reader. If you'd just hand it in for Dr. Semianoff, he'll know all about it and I can get back to Mr. Selby at once. And thank you ever so much, Mr. Baruch!"

"But," protested Mr. Baruch, "it is a little thing—it is nothing. And it is much pleasure to me to do this for you and the poor man. To-night he will have it, and to-morrow perhaps he will be better."

They went down the stairs together and bade each other a friendly good-night in the gateway.

"And I'm ever so much obliged to you, Mr. Baruch," said Miss Pilgrim again, her pale face shining in the dusk.

Mr. Baruch put a fatherly hand on her sleeve. "Hush! you must not say it," he said. "It is I that am happy."

Half an hour later he found what he sought in a large furniture-store on the Pushkinskaya—an imitation Persian rug, manufactured in Frankfurt, and priced at seventeen roubles. With a little bargaining—the salesman was no match for Mr. Baruch at that—he got it for fifteen and a half. He himself directed the packing of it, to see that no store-label was included in the parcel; and a quarter of an hour later he delivered it by cab to the *dvoruck* at the hospital-gate for Dr. Semianoff. Then

he drove homewards; he could not spare the time to walk while the bundle he held in his arms was yet unopened and its treasure housed in his home.

His stratagem was perfect. Even if the Armenian were to make an outcry, who would lend him an ear? It would appear—it could easily be made to appear—that he was endeavoring to extort money from Miss Pilgrim upon a flimsy pretext that a worthless rug had been substituted for a valuable one, and the police would know how to deal with him. Mr. Baruch put the matter behind him contentedly.

The majestic woman in his home watched him impassively as he unpacked his parcel and spread the rug loosely across a couple of chairs in the salon. In actual words he said only: "This the carpet, Adina—for your bed. Look at it well!" She looked obediently, glancing from it to his face, her own still with its unchanging calm, and wondered dully in her sex-specialized brain at the light of rapture in his countenance. He pored upon it, devouring its rareness of beauty, the sum and the detail of its perfection, with a joy as pure, an appreciation as generous, as if he had not stolen it from under the hands of a sick pauper and a good Samaritan.

Mr. Baruch was happy.

That night he stood at the door of his wife's room. "Blessings upon you," he said, and smiled at her in acknowledgment of the blessings she returned. A brass-and-glass lantern contained the electric light in the chamber; it shone softly on all the apparatus of toilet and slumber, and upon the picture that was Mr. Baruch's chief work of art—the marble-white face thrown into high relief by the unbound black hair and the colours, like a tangle of softened and subdued rainbows, that flowed from her bosom to the foot of the bed. He crossed the floor and bent and kissed her where she lay.

"Wonderful," he said to her. "You are a question, an eternal question. And here"—his hand moved on the surface of the rug like a caress—"is the answer to you. Two perfect things—two perfect things!"

"Blessings!" she murmured.

"I have them," he said. "Two of them," and laughed and left her.

He did not see Miss Pilgrim the following day nor the next; that was easy for him to contrive, for much of his business was done outside his office. It was not that he had any fear of meeting her; but it was more agreeable to his feelings not to be reminded by the sight of her of her part in the acquisition of the carpet. Upon the third day he was late in arriving, for his wife had complained at breakfast of headache and sickness, and he had stayed to comfort her and see her back to bed for a twenty-four hours' holiday from life. On his way he had stopped at a florist to send her back some flowers.

He was barely seated at his desk when there was a knock upon his door and Miss Pilgrim entered.

He smiled his usual pleasant welcome to her.

"Ah, Miss Pilgrim, good-morning: I am glad to see you. You will sit down—yes?"

He was rising to give her a chair; he was not in the least afraid of her; when something about her arrested him, a trouble, a note of sorrow.

"Mr. Baruch," she began.

He knew the value of the deft interruption that breaks the thread of thought. "There is something not right?" he suggested. "I hope not." With a manner of sudden concern he added, "The poor man, he is worse—no?"

Miss Piligrim showed him a stricken face and eyes a-brim with tears. "He's—he's dead!" she quavered.

"See, now!" said Mr. Baruch, shocked. "What a sad thing—and after all your kind treatment. I am sorry,

Miss Pilgrim; but it is to remember that the poor man has come here through much hardship—yes? And at the least, you have given him back his rug to comfort him."

"But——" Miss Pilgrim stayed his drift of easy, grave speech with a sort of cry. "That's the cause of all the trouble and danger—and you only did it to help me. You must come with me to the Town Clinic at once. Mr. Selby's gone already. There'll be no danger if you come at once."

"Danger?" repeated Mr. Baruch. "I have not understood." But though in all truth he did not understand, a foreboding of knowledge was chill upon him. He cleared his throat. "What did he die of?"

Miss Pilgrim's tears had overflowed. She had a difficulty in speaking. But her stammered words came as clearly to his ears as though they had been shouted.

"Small-pox!"

He sat down heavily in the chair whence he had risen to receive her, and Miss Pilgrim through her tears saw him shrivel in a gust of utter terror. All his mask of complacency, of kindly power, of reticence of spirit, fell from him; he gulped and his mouth sagged slack. She moved a pace nearer to him.

"But it'll be all right, Mr. Baruch, if you'll just come to the Clinic at once and be vaccinated. It's only because we touched him—and the rugs. There isn't any need to be so frightened."

She could not divine the vision that stood before his strained eyes—the white face of a woman, weary with her ailment and the beautiful thing that blanketed her, beautiful and venomous like a snake. His senses swam. But from his shaking lips two words formed themselves: "My wife!"

"Oh, *come* along, Mr. Baruch," cried Miss Pilgrim.

"Your wife hasn't touched the rugs. She'll be perfectly all right!"

He gave her a look that began abjectly, but strengthened as it continued to something like a strange sneer. For he was a connoisseur—he knew; and he was certain that Fate would never leave a drama unfinished like that.

Ref. Mirrielees 14864

Significant contemporary stories.